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The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

***Fashion in Amman New Camp: An Ethnographical Study of Consumption  
in a Palestinian Refugee Camp***

A Thesis submitted to  
the Department of Middle East Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

By: Ashley Fortner-Dominguez

Under the supervision of Dr. Sandrine Gamblin

May, 2017



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For the people of Wihdat who opened their homes and their hearts.

For my mother whose love makes everything possible.



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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an ethnography conducted with the residents of the Amman New Camp (Wihdat) on their fashion consumption. Consumption is approached as a multidimensional structure that exhibits itself in common and uncommon ways of life and it also permeates people's conceptualizations of the world in which they live as well as the creation of their own identities. It therefore interacts with the fundamental elements of social life and culture, relaying a channel by which messages and meanings are exchanged or transferred. It spans over a wide range of practices and generates diverse styles for embedding people and societies into trends that sustain this structure. Consumption styles and trends that are embedded in this structure define much wider elements, both along hierarchies and along highly subjective preferences, all of which function to consolidate norms and ways of being across different domains of life.

I explore the environment and lives of the Wihdat residents, living with them and participating in some of their daily and occasional consumption of fashionable commodities. Three main themes emerge to represent the core categories in which fashion consumerism occurs – consumption of homes, clothing, and bodies. The consumption that occurs in these categories is detailed by complex needs that come as signifiers for norms, desires, preferences, and values. Islamic values emerge for a variety of commodities consumed across the three categories but they interlace with a wide range of subjective individual and collective perceptions, all of which interact with the camp conditions and ways of life as has come to be established by the residents and the community at-large.



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## Introduction

Amman New Camp is known for its soccer team, Wihdat. More than its soccer team, though, most of the men watch soccer games religiously and this afternoon in February was no exception. I sat on the farshāt<sup>1</sup> with Hanan in her living room, whispering and giggling as we watched her brothers and their friends meticulously follow the soccer game unfolding on the television, all the while breathing in the aroma of Arabic coffee and the very present smell of the argilah's apple-scented vapors that filled the room. Bored from sitting on the farshāt for such a long time without much to do, Hanan leaned over and whispered for me to follow her to the bedroom so we could be away from the men and they could be more comfortable. As she closed the door behind her and we sat in the even smaller room with no furniture, she became giddy and asked, "Do you want to see something?" and then jumped up and stood in front of the wall-long closet. She slowly opened one of the closet doors and began to pull out each item of clothing from her closet one by one and tell me about it—who bought it for her and when she acquired it. Skillfully pulling out the unattached drawers and wiggling them back shut, Hanan proclaimed "This is my favorite!" as she pulled out a dark purple mini-skirt and halter top with black lace on the edges. While she had shown me other shorter length skirts and tank tops, her black and purple outfit was by far the most risqué of the collection. When I asked her about *that* outfit, she responded: "I wear this around the house but only when I am alone." Being the youngest between her and her two brothers meant, for her, that she had to listen to her older brother's opinion on clothing, and, in her words, "he doesn't like me wearing these clothes. He doesn't understand women."

Hanan's comments were about clothing, but they also highlight the distinctions that are evident between the public sphere and the private sphere within Wihdat as it relates to women's

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<sup>1</sup> A Farsha (pl. farshāt) is a floor sofa common found in the reception areas of Middle Eastern homes.

fashions. Even though the pursuit of elegance and refinement has characterized trends of consumption across social, cultural, and economic divides, Hanan's needs, tastes, and preferences, are highlighted and concealed by her interaction with items, spaces, and even people.

This ethnography explores the consumer lives of women living in Amman New Camp, a Palestinian refugee camp established within the boundaries of Amman, Jordan's capital city. Although there is a vast amount of work that has been done on the culture of consumption, little has been done to explore consumption as a site of constituting and contesting distinctions within refugee communities. In looking at the patterns of consumption in Wihdat through the incorporation of voices of those directly involved the daily consumer practices, this work aims to reveal the ways in which contemporary consumption is differentiated and to explore the heterogeneities and complexities that exist within a refugee community, not simply among Palestinians but within our very understandings of identity. The pervasive theme of this paper is that the consumer sphere, even within a refugee camp such as Wihdat, is by its very nature heterogeneous and complex. By using consumption as a lens to explore the effects of politics, economics, and culture on the formation of identity, this project aims to contribute a unique approach to understanding refugee communities.

## **Defining Consumption**

Activity that represents consumption may range from the intentions manifested in acquiring strategic resources in the process of satisfying needs to the use of such resources for the mere purpose of shaping tastes and preferences. The former is a more active form of consumption and is often represented in such activities as shopping and making purchases while the latter is a less active form that may be manifested in such activities as looking in the window of a store on the way to work or fantasizing about a suit or shoes or even a game. "The

consumption process is not limited only to the active: shopping and making purchases. Rather, it includes engagement with a diverse range of materials, images, and ideas.” (Chin 7).

In seeking to examine the structure of consumption, it is important to situate it in a time and place in order to be able to define it. This requires that commodities be considered in observation in order to transcend from ideas to items that can be located in time and space. The commodity form therefore takes over and it can be tracked in changes that occur over time and among different populations. Thus, there is no one-to-one relationship between a particular item and a specific identity. This can be seen most clearly in the way the advertising campaigns target their products to specific groups of people in different ways. While a phone might be advertised in a particular circle as an item of luxury that can set one apart from others, in other circles it might be sold as an item of necessity to communicate with family. The commodity form of fashion and its resulting consumption is a complicated dynamic agent-subject relationship with a two-way channel of control but which is also characterized by irregular balances in power, stagnancy, rapid and slow transformations, and issues of legitimacy. It however embodies the core function of fashion that can be executed through such elements as attitudes, tastes, preferences, values, and possible social stratifications that can be brought into play through its elements. Consumption is executed through the system of objects that are deemed to be useful for the society in which fashion is consumed.

Consumption is a multidisciplinary issue in academia, spanning the realms of sociology, anthropology, history, cultural studies, and philosophy. In sociology and cultural studies, the concept touches on ways of life of the consumer, norms and styles of consumption, and other overarching conceptualizations of consumption in human interactions as portrayed in competition culture, and which also shape consumer culture. The works of Zygmunt Bauman, Pierre Bourdieu, Mike Featherstone, and Georg Simmel have revealed important theoretical and empirical insights on consumer life and practices. The consumer is seen to be styling her habits



for acquiring and using commodities in a manner that sophisticates her needs to generate complete lifestyles, cultures, and aspirations that can entirely redefine her existence.

In consuming items of elegance, the consumer comes out to portray core elements of her consumption decisions, enforcing some conspicuous elements of her preferences and allowing herself to be categorized and refined by these items. Unlike the consumption of other commodities, the consumption of items of elegance is the consumption of style. As Baudrillard notes, consumption is a structure applied in various ways to achieve diverse goals. By examining the more fundamental elements of the theoretical models applied to frame and describe consumption, one cannot doubt the extent to which the complexity of consumption is revered and also condemned. However, we can analyze consumption patterns without being patronizing (Miller, *Consumption Studies*). One of the more underlying issues that characterize analyses of consumption in social sciences is the pursuit for meaning in the activities that are seen to represent consumption – meaning as perceived (if any is perceived at all) by the consumer and as framed in the theories that inform the analyses. In as much as one consumer may be thought to find her consumption behavior as to be meaningful another consumer may consider such behavior as to be a search for meaning. When consumption is analyzed or framed for any purpose, it is therefore important to distinguish procedures that are aimed at identifying ‘meaning as it is’ from those that are meant to examine the process of meaning creation. The approaches we select and the issues we choose to examine may automatically define the extent to which we do this.

The mechanisms by which consumption is brought to life as a structure that gets embedded in systemic decision-making processes are hinted on by Bauman who emphasizes that this structure reflects responses to life conditions (Bauman 2001, 18). In seeking to draw a line between the environment of consumption and the consumption process itself one would then wonder how life conditions come to be an integral part of the environment in order for the consumer to explore the boundaries that emerge between the consuming agent and the complex

yielded by life conditions and the consumables. The consumables may then be seen as to be part of the life conditions and as such, the response elicited by the consumer abstracts over the core underlying intention for all consumption, which if represented in any way only renders a structured response to the environment across the selected dimension. For in observing the random regular shopper, commodities are purchased in any preferred order but the entire selection made represents the boundaries of the imagined consumption as will be implemented in a given setting and by a consumer or consumers of given consumption behaviors. The extent to which needs are met cannot be known to the random observer but it would be inappropriate to assume that the consumption of a known set of commodities is completely indeterminable, as in practical sense; a loaf of bread and a slice of cheese would be represented precisely in a known habit of consumption that is commonly associated with these items but the application of such representation would only work for a predetermined purpose as conceived by the person making such a representation. Nevertheless, consumers act collectively to stabilize collective norms of consumption and still retain some individual capacities for making selections from a variety of choices.

## **Fashion**

The pursuit of elegance and refinement has characterized trends of consumption across social, cultural, and economic divides. Fashion as a product and input of this pursuit provides (and is provided by) societies with a representation of possible models of consumption. Needs, tastes, and preferences are highlighted and also concealed by the consumer's interaction with items, spaces, and behaviors of refinement and elegance in order to yield impressions that can be shared and confer meanings that are far more sophisticated than the objects consumed and the basic value that can be added to the bodies that are used to make these impressions. The consumption of fashion therefore relays a trend in the social realm of human existence and

presents an occurrence that can serve as a window into the deeper elements of organization or lack of it as may characterize the livelihoods of people in different sections of the society.

The dynamic nature of fashion is fundamental to its occurrence as an issue of relevance to those who recognize such an occurrence (Hines and Quinn, 2007). Trends are developed across the dimension of time and also sustained long enough to allow for adequate representation to occur across populations and to also allow such representation to be considered as a fashionable element. Masses can therefore participate as performers and audiences of their own performance in order to actualize fashionable elements. External observers identify such performance by applying reference to other trends of consumption and may therefore create through comparison and thus represent fashion as an idea. Their context of creation will therefore determine the fashion that is observed or imagined. As observers transcend to performers, fashion shapes itself as what is imagined becomes dependent on what is possible and only what is performed yields ideas that can be considered to be fashionable either in the current, past, or future trends of consumption. Fashion is therefore bold and expressive, and yet for one to gain an understanding of what it represents, its commodity form has to be seen in action as an artefact that is used to project some consistent meaning in all communication that makes reference to it. For how then could fashion be distinguished from the culture and the human behavior that creates it? On whether such a distinction should even be conceptualized and whether it can even be of any use in understanding fashion, the nature of fashion itself is brought to question and its systemic consumption at the individual and group levels as well as within micro-cultures and macro-cultures relays only the commodity form to provide reliably perceptible elements of fashion. Consumption of fashion is therefore central to its occurrence, and through it; the individual human is therefore able to recognize trends to which they can relate their object form and track this relation through time and space – a manifestation of fashion consumption.

The commodity form of fashion assigns a location-specific lens to its consumption. Weller (2004) note that fashion consumption is a trend that is facilitated primarily by the global commodity chains and it is hereby felt that its commodity form can also serve as a platform for the exchange of values and ideas. Global fashion meets local fashion preferences and cultural norms through which it is revised and suited to the local context (Weller, 2004: 313) – the flow of fashion ideas along its commodity form is also reflected in Ewen (1982: 16) ideas that indicated the historical elements of fashion were capable of situating it within the overall trends that characterized global industrial development, interacting with the emerging aspects of consumer capitalism as well as with mass-media imagery and sometimes making people to create individuals and group identities. Mass consumption of fashion can therefore be seen to occur along both divergent and shared interests, values and preferences and this means that the resulting consumption patterns may not always reflect patronage for a few select brands and lifestyles. Examining consumption patterns will therefore not always redirect focus to the ethical issues that are associated with such patronage or to the need to evaluate moral values related to mass consumption. The responses that may be relayed through fashion towards structures of capital and behavioral elements of consumption are also diverse, and they should be documented (Miller). The use of specific situational observations instead of generalizations may therefore help to avoid intellectual hegemony – hence the need for an ethnographic approach to avoid creating inaccurate labels for the groups that engage in fashion consumption (Burke). Kotlowitz (1999) discusses his study of Chicago and the children that live there. Because the environment that they lived in was a sheltered environment that they had never left, it was impossible for him to truly understand the degree of connection that they had, as there were many experiences that he, as an observer, introduced them to. Similarly, my time in Wihdat illustrates this exact relationship – most of the people that I met inside the refugee camp had never ventured outside the ‘walls’ of the camp.

Therefore, in conceptualizing fashion as an occurrence that be explored to develop an understanding of issues that happen within the social and cultural domain, it is important that we apply a comprehensive conceptualization of fashion both as a trend occurring within the structure of consumption. The limits placed upon such conceptualization by theory tend to enforce a generalist approach to the articulation of the ways of the fashion consumer and the framing of fashion as “anything” reflected in the consumption of items of elegance and refinement. However, ethnographic research warrants engagement with people that participate in the actual phenomenon under study and in considering Simmel’s understanding of fashion where “fashion can absorb to all appearances and *in abstracto* any chosen content: any given form of clothing, art, conduct, or opinion can become fashionable” (Simmel, 1957: 204), I contend that the role of the ethnographic researcher is to define the actual appearances that are considered and observed in order to provide a basis for consistent analysis of the issues selected and which apply to the situation of the society under study. Although Simmel argues that fashions are always class fashions that are distinguishable, this is contested in the sense that some fashions that surpass social strata are generated in the application of the contextual elements of design that are tied to such issues as religion and other general aspects of life that tend to stretch the locational aspects of societies involved in the implementation such wider aspects of such strata. Moreover, fashions could also co-occur with counter-fashions, and in essence, a fashion becomes a combination of all of the strategies at the individual and group levels in societies – both those that attempt to assimilate and those that are responding through rebellion against current “fashions”. The paradox, however, is that the response in itself is also fashionable and it therefore contributes to the consumption of fashion.

Given the involvement of the consumer in driving the conceptualization and performance of fashion, the rate at which changes in fashion and responses to such changes are consumed and mechanisms by which they are actualized in people’s daily lives may therefore also inform decisions at the consumer level, and as such, research can benefit more from observing

real-world outcomes of the decisions made in the context of the society in question – which warrants the prioritization of locational aspects – and for this study, the Wihdat Refugee Camp is selected. However, fashion is actualized by the consumer at the sub-locational levels that are accessible to her and hence the need arises to focus on the points at which it becomes evident. In the current study, outcomes are observed mainly for the categories of the body, the home, and the camp. Significant focus is also given to clothing in order to orient the ethnography towards the commodity form and also for the reason that clothing is easy to spot, and whenever other elements of fashion are not presented, it also presents a window for opening interaction and discussion on these elements.

In such an approach, fashion is studied for specific contexts and locations. A refugee camp represents a society that many would contend is transitory due to its intended purpose of providing temporary shelter for those who cannot stay in their homelands, and as such, it can also reflect some explicit aspects of fashion that may be reflected through locational transitions in order to understand the wider sociocultural elements of the consumption of fashion.

## **The Consumer and the Consumed**

The interaction between different components of the structure of consumption can provide insight into relations that are important to the consumers' own engagement with such a structure (Bauman, 1998; Baudrillard, 1998). Bauman contends that while society used to be clearly divided between things to be consumed and people who consumed them, the modern society of consumers no longer reflects this clear distinction. He argues that consumer society is unique precisely because the line between commodity and subject is blurred and in some cases even erased. Bauman demonstrates the relationship between identity, consumerism, and culture, and the way in which these all manifest in the fashion consumer. The market acts as a force that already forces people to take part in it, but it still works subversively so that individuals feel as though they have the power of choice. And, in many ways, they do have such power in that they

can choose any of the options presented to them, but at the end, they must make a choice, so in that sense, they lack a choice to participate. There also exists a link between money and symbols – money is often used to symbolize possession. The person that has money can be imagined to possess things that she may not even have developed interest for. The knowledge that is developed for a person's status based on the amounts of money that they are known to be having is dependent on how we understand our own needs and the extent to which they can be reflected in the person's need hierarchy. The ability of conferring possession of anonymous commodities sits at the center of the power of money. "In the world of consumption, the possession of goods is only one of the stakes of the competition" (Bauman, 1998: 57).

The person that is endowed with possessions is not however capable of defining all dimensions along which her possessions will be understood. Instead, the good possess symbology that can be combined in multiple ways, taking and leaving what each individual likes and dislikes. The consequence of this is that these symbols – "the shape of one's body, bodily adornments, the type and contents of one's home, the places one attends and where one can be seen, the way one behaves or talks, what one talks about, one's demonstrable artistic and literary taste, the food one eats and the fashion in which the food is prepared" (Bauman, *Freedom*, 63) – can realistically create various identities through making the necessary purchases or making the necessary changes to one's routines. Bauman explores the body as some kind of project that in modern times, plays an important place in the discussion of self-identity. Bauman contends that the modern obsession with the body is an attempt to surpass the limitations of the body to make it 'perfect' and defy the *ultimate* limitation that the body has, which is death. The scholar's work is also very insightful in exploring the consumer-commodity relationship, but its broad analysis overlooks the unique situation of a refugee camp by not addressing the way that the existence of non-governmental organizations doing assistance projects inside Wihdat already commodifies the camp to a certain degree, using images of the camps as "sellable commodities" to raise international attention and aid. As such, not only did the women make themselves consumables

through fashion, but they were already unknowingly consumed just by being refugees in an internationally supported refugee camp. Although this paper departs from the literature on refugee identity that reduces Palestinian refugees to objects of compassion and views them as agents, it still recognizes that the intricacies of this case in which external factors—living space, economics, and politics—may also influence the Palestinian youth’s relationship to themselves as commodities. At the most basic level, the shifting and dynamic nature of Palestinian identity inside of Wihdat is apparent in the various legal definitions of a Palestinian refugee, who in Jordan, can be citizens, green card holders, yellow card holders, blue card holders, and Jerusalem residents.<sup>2</sup> These political statuses determine the kind of services and resources that Palestinians have access to as well as constitute difference in social and class status. This paper attends to the various complexities within a refugee community, helping to focus Bauman’s theories by putting them in direct conversation with Wihdat residents.

## Needs and Wants

Although Bauman helps identify the overlap between the consumer and the consumed, Bourdieu’s *Distinction* highlights the link between consumption and class. Consumption ultimately places people within categories based on their preferences and capabilities. The distinctions in people’s consumption preferences reflect key social distinctions, and the structure of the consumption is the key to its reproduction. The social distinctions that are brought to light are not only class distinctions, but also gender distinctions. The relationship of a particular class to certain consumption practices is not set, but instead changes both from society to society and through time. This can be in the way we understand “style” as something that goes in and out and thus, becomes connected to particular meaning within particular societies. Many times,

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<sup>2</sup> Hazem Jamjoum and Anis Kassim, “Palestinian Refugees in Jordan and the Revocation of Citizenship: An Interview with Anis F. Kassim,” *Jadaliyya*, January 28, 2013, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/9827/palestinian-refugees-in-jordan-and-the-revocation->.



the choice to choose something is not just because that is good, but instead the alternative is bad. Perceiving the consumer as to be a user, outcome, victim, beneficiary, or just as a separate conceivable element of the consumption structure is only useful for making objective assessments of consumers' involvement in consumption. The individual, family, society, culture, or group can be the consumer, and as such, their engagement in consumption has to be assessed based on specific characteristics that may be of importance to them through their determinations of needs and wants. These characteristics are however numerous and it is common to find focus being directed at the relations that emerge between different consumer categories. It is therefore evident for such cases that the nature of consumption as a structure indeed precedes the perception of structure among its components. These relations provide more meaning when applied to various systematic elements of meaning as may be conceived in commodity-consumer relations, power relations, social relations, and cultural identities.

Some might find issue with a needs and wants-based approach to understanding identity and consumption, citing the communicative function of consumption that is often expressed in Baudrillard's works, in which the system of objects that are involved relay signs and symbols in order to facilitate the creation of their own relevance provide consumers with a structure for formulating their own relations with elements of the structure (Chin 8). These relations can mainly be seen to be representing needs and the need structures. The consumer is able to interact with her world through them but for Baudrillard, needs are not always a reflection of reality, but instead, they are many times constructed by society and are falsities and illusions (not innate). Some needs can however be seen to bear some legitimacy because they are driven by the need to survive or enhance survival. However, most of the needs that are aimed at enhancing survival are satisfied by consumption that often exceeds the baseline needs and this is facilitated by the inherent features of the consumption structure, in particular; its inefficiency in helping consumers to identify and satisfy the real needs. As such, the consumer behavior that emerges from such spending is bound to reflect elements of such inefficiency. Whenever such outcomes

are considered, consumption is often examined with the role of the consumer in mind. However, there is no single specific persona that can represent the consumer and in as much as we are able to the various aspects of human agency that mediate the initiatives of consumption, there are other systems that consume in a manner that does not reflect elements of human nature. As such, consumption as a structure draws from a diverse pool of elements in nature as human needs co-occur with the needs of other elements of nature. However, these needs are mainly complicated by initiatives that involve the direct participation of human beings both at individual and social levels as is best exemplified in the consumption of culture and social relations. The aspirations of human beings are brought to question as human they have been known to transcend the boundaries of rational imagination and to also abstract over hyper-realistic aspects of reasoning. Societies embody some of the highest levels of complexity for these aspects of consumption as they provide the most demotivated individual with support towards becoming a consumer. The innocent and the wild are socialized to achieve a status of having needs that they can no longer ignore while those that have no resources are provided with ambition to seek and achieve sustained consumption. Timothy Burke's book on Zimbabwe looks at the role of toiletries such as hair grease, skin creams, and deodorant. He argues that "a need is no less real for having been historically generated." (216). The current generation of consumers has inherited a need structure relayed by systematic exposure to objects and opportunities for consumption over history. The industrial revolution and the rise of modern economic systems served not only the ordinary household but were mainly applied to maintain power structures and to institute social structures, some of which have persisted to this day. Societies that would be more concerned with the systemic oppression that has persisted as a result of these stratifications are occupied by consumption that emerged from it. Elements of neo-colonialism persist in the consumption structure and as Burke observes, consumption aligns them to the aspirations of the individual through signs presented in it and through the choices presented to her.

## Wihdat

Wihdat, known officially as Amman New Camp, is a Palestinian refugee camp in Amman, the capital city of Jordan. It was set up in 1955 to cater for about 5,000 refugees and it has transformed over the years to its new state where it hosts a population of about 50,000 refugees. The camp is situated south of the Amman City Centre. Its structure is complicated by the lack of clear demarcations in form of visible boundaries that can mark it as an enclosure. It is partly integrated into the rest of the Amman city.



Figure 1 Hand-drawn map of Amman New Camp framed inside of the lejnat al-mukhayam.

The camp is also an active region and just like the rest of the city; economic activity can be seen to be thriving. Some of the residents are able to acquire commodities from outside the camp and they are able to trade just like the other city dwellers. However, its relatively minimalist infrastructure – narrow passageways and dilapidated housing – makes it stand out as a relatively different geographical unit. The transformations that it has undergone over the decades have led to it transitioning from being composed of semi-permanent shelters such as tents, which

dominated the scene for about two decades until the 1970s and 80s, to the currently developed permanent housing structures as well as the functional economy in the camp.

“The first streets were built across the camp’s territory mainly for security purposes.

Later, electricity, telephone and – in the 1980s – waste-water lines were installed. The housing reconstruction boom began in the early 1980s with the new regulations for permanent-cement roofs (until that time the housing units could only have tin-plate or zinc-plate roofs) and limited second floor permissions.” (Hamarneh)

Tight armed control of the camp by the Jordanian armed forces was in place until 1989, and the changes that followed liberalized the political scene leading to higher levels of autonomy for the camp dwellers and more developed structures. Palestinian-Jordanian returnees hailing from Gulf States also moved into Wihdat following the Second Gulf War which led to more construction activities and increased trade in the region. Hamarneh notes that development of the camp has also been unbalanced as the eastern portions have developed into low-middle class residential while the southern quarters are degraded into slum-like dwellings. About 44 per cent of the camp residents live in the two-room dwellings (Tiltne, Age, and Zhang, Huafeng, 2013). Fafo also ranked the camp second among ten other camps for high levels of poverty (Tiltne, Age, and Zhang, Huafeng, 2013). About one third of Palestine refugees have incomes that are below Jordan’s poverty line (placed at JD 814). Female unemployment is high – at about 24 percent. The camp also records the highest incidence for some of the severe health problems and about 66 percent of the Palestinian refugees lack health insurance.

Palestinian nationalism dominated in the earlier periods of this transition. The camp has over 20,000 small businesses with commodities flowing in from many parts of the world. Even more important to this transformation is the continued socialization of camp dwellers with the local population. Over the long period of time, the camp dwellers have preserved some elements of the Palestinian culture but has also acquired aspects of a Jordanian identity with some of its inhabitants acquiring Jordanian citizenship. Kheirallah (2012) notes that most Palestinian

refugees in Jordan belong to the second and third-generations of the original immigrants. Many of them have known the camp as to be their home and they are therefore bound to develop an identity that is shaped by the environment of the camp. However, access to mainstream media is also high and the inhabitants of the camp have also been known to participate in sporting activities – the camp is in fact well-known for its football club. The members of the Wihdat Refugee camp are also part of a much wider Palestinian community in Jordan and their history has been enriched by political, cultural, and social transformations over the past ten decades. They also occur within the context of global political upheavals, with the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, the roles of such organizations as the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and the wider political situation involving Jordan, Palestinian nationalists, Israel, Syria, their allies and foes among other complex elements shaping the refugees' nationalist ideologies. The government of Jordan also has keen political interest in Palestinian refugees especially considering the role that they played in the Black September Coup. The Palestinian refugees have also existed in a circumstance whereby the permanent national identity is out of reach and they compose one of the largest groups of people that have been affected by forced immigration (FMRU 2012). Their status as refugees has therefore come to be a permanent aspect of the societies in which they exist and this is bound to impact on their understanding of their individual and collective identities.

Wihdat Camp dwellers also occur in a fairly unstable political environment where the increase in the numbers of Palestinians in Jordan has impacted on the native (especially in the eastern region) Jordanian society's views of the long-term regional political crisis but the Palestinian society has also dwelt in the region for a very long time – it is also impractical to ignore the historical links between some Palestinian communities to the many regions of Jordan and its neighborhood. Palestinians in Jordanian refugee camps can be said to exist under the circumstances of: Jordan's willingness and capacity to accommodate them in its territory, the state of international relations (with regard to the region's political situation), and the availability

of humanitarian aid from different international organizations. The actual interventions by the Jordanian government in their welfare are also far more complicated than mere goodwill as they help to reinforce some elements of political power structures – Jordan’s earlier annexation of the West Bank and its roles as facilitator of the current state of political situation. The camp dwellers are therefore in a position where their society serves some political interests that go far back into the history predating their current lives. The need to consider Jordan’s Palestinian refugees’ livelihoods within the context of wider political situation is not the core subject of the current study but it helps to establish some markers for possible trends in nationalist expressions that often emerge in some styles of consumption. Moreover, identity is shaped (and also shapes) trends of consumption as people can establish preferences and tastes that are based on it. Mass consumption may also reflect the state of coexistence of current generations of camp dwellers with the general Jordanian public depends largely on the stability of political systems and on the ability of communities to establish and sustain shared interests. The Palestinian community is mostly identified for their position in the tensions in West Bank and Gaza but inter-cultural and inter-communal issues span beyond such a position to include issues of identity and long-term development of individuals in these societies. The Palestinians have had relatively less opportunities to shape their national identities due their being displaced from the region that they consider to be their national heritage. The long-standing sociopolitical tension in the region has therefore mainly led to the current state of humanitarian efforts that are aimed at alleviating suffering for the communities that have been affected by such tension. The establishment of the Wihdat Camp and other refugee camps in Jordan is part of such effort. However, the political issues that have shaped the identities of communities in the region also point to how they are led to understand the wider issues that shape locational aspects of their existence within the camps and within the communities that have emerged from the situation. The camp can therefore be seen to be a symbolization of a more complex situation that could unravel the historical and cultural implications of transformations in the political realm.

Communities that occur in circumstances that have been created primarily by forced migration are also bound to be concerned about changes that could influence their statehood and the dwellers of the Wihdat refugee camp are not an exception – the camp's present structure has been designed and facilitated by the Jordanian government whose intentions can be seen to be inclined towards increasing integration, and the Wihdat inhabitants are also expected (in one way or the other) to acknowledge the implications of their community's cooperation with the government of the day. Their long-term peaceful coexistence and the peace treaties that have been established between Jordan and Israel have however settled some serious concerns.

## **The Study**

Fashion is a multidisciplinary concept and as has been shown in the literature review, it has many diverse components. The study of fashion is therefore bound to involve the exploration of the different aspects of theory and practice that touch on the occurrence, applicability, and influence of fashion on societies and on the lives of people. While Crane and Bovone (2006) view the analyses of different dimensions of the material culture as to be fashion as to be an overarching approach to the study of its essential components, Skov and Melchoir (2008) view the selection of a suitable framework as to be supreme to any objective analyses of fashion. Ethnography is applied widely in both sociology and anthropology as it provides adequate room for tailoring various sets of methods to context of the research aim in order to help researchers to capture elements of their interest (Green, 2015: 6). Ethnographic researchers can therefore collect and generate data by applying a variety of methods, including: observation, interviews, participation, and by making interpretations.

In applying ethnographic methods, the researcher has to understand the capacity of such methods in helping to generate knowledge in a form that can be relied upon for drawing useful conclusions. The nature of the knowledge that is to be generated therefore forms the central and the very initial consideration that is made in selecting such methods. Ethnography also provides

some useful approaches for addressing problems of validity, with crystallization and triangulation being some of the most common methods that are applied to increase the investigative research power and avert misinterpretation of data (Richardson, 2000, and Stake, 2000). Ethnographic accounts can also be determined in six major ways: contextually drawing from the meaningful social milieus that they also create; rhetorically using and being used by the conventions of expression; institutionally writing within and also against the specific traditions, audiences, and disciplines in question; generically being distinguishable from travel account or novels; politically having the authority to make representations of cultural realities but also potentially encountering unequal and sometimes contested balances; and, historically being dynamic for all the listed constraints and conventions. They therefore have potentially wide applications and the need to focus them on a suitable contextual approach is often fulfilled by the decisions made by the researcher before and during field work or study.

Over the course of a year, I conducted participant observations in homes and neighborhoods, and I also engaged in more directed research by taking some of the residents on shopping trips. What I saw during my time there was a continuous act of balancing needs and desires. The residents balanced the needs of the family with the desires of the self on a daily basis. Desire was often vocalized but it was many times unfulfilled due to lack of economic resources and the prioritization of the family needs.

The research centers around the five families that lived on a certain unnamed alley between one Al-Nady Street and its opposite street. My initial introduction to the refugee camp came through the Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA), which provided me with an overview of the camp and with the permission to research in its boundary. The DPA provided me with the government permit and subsequently referred me to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) office for assistance with my project, which then sent me to meet with the director of the *lajnat almukhayam* (Camp Committee). It was during my visit with him that I met his assistant Mohammad who introduced



me to his sister Hanan and his neighbors Maysun, Sa'eda, and Asma, around whom much of this ethnography centers. I spent much of my time following them through a variety of activities: exploring the market, walking through the neighborhood, going to local stores, hanging out at their homes or on the steps in front of each of their houses as we talked late into the evenings. Despite not being a random selection of people, these families were representative of families in Wihdat, which was economically diverse. Households ranged in size from the three people living in Sa'eda's home to the seven people living in Maysun's home. Households were headed by a single father (1), and mother and father (4). Four of the families lived in homes that they owned, while Hanan's family lived in a home owned by a relative. Only one of the households had a car of its own. Three of the families were comprised of a couple with children and two of the households were grown, unmarried children with parents. The men either worked or were retired from jobs as diverse as Camp Committee employee, sales clerk, teacher, store owner. Yet, life was not necessarily easier for those that had better titles, as Maysun told me that her husband's income from his store that was used to pay for the seven members of their family was only 800JD a month, if that.

As the families grew more familiar with me, I was able to attend Eid celebrations, accompany Hanan to plan her engagement party and subsequently attend it, visit the private spaces inside peoples' homes, accompany the women on shopping trips, and go on special outings—ice cream trips, shopping trips to West Amman, and other excursions outside of the camp boundaries. The men in the families were included in some of the activities, but not all of them. Including them in the activities afforded me a larger sense of the dynamics in the decision-making surrounding fashion choices and allowed me to have meaningful conversations with them about their perspectives on fashion—its meaning, its influence, its importance.

Three women—Hanan, Maysun, and Asma—are at the core of my work in this paper. In the year that I spent visiting Wihdat, I came to know these three women and their families best. Hanan lived with her two brothers and her father. At twenty-seven, she was unwed and nervous

about her prospects of marrying, since she was responsible for taking care of her widowed father while her brothers went to work each day. She spent most of her day attending to the house, mopping the floors, washing the clothing, and cooking food in time for her brothers to come home to lunch and, later, dinner. Her house was the gathering spot for her and her friends, as the women on the street would frequently meet at Hanan's house to enjoy coffee and television in the mornings, chatting about the men and gossiping about the women who were not present while her father sat on the corner farsheh throughout the day smoking his pipe. When her brothers, Mohammad and Mahmoud, returned from work in the evenings, Hanan would attend to their needs, bringing them coffee, tea, snacks, and anything else they needed while they watched football games or played football video games.

Maysun was in her mid thirties when I met her. She had five children—two boys and three girls—who took the majority of her time. Her oldest daughter, Dana, was in eighth grade and was contemplating dropping out of school because she did not want to study anymore. She and her sixth-grade sister Leila, would only attend school for half days, since the schools had too many students to offer full day sessions. Leila attended school in the morning and Dana in the afternoon. Their younger siblings, Ahmad and Mohammad, in third grade and first grade respectively, frequently missed school because they did not want to go, so they often stayed at home with Maysun and their three-year-old sister, Filistyn, who was the pampered member of the family and named after their distant but not forgotten homeland. With so many children at home during the days, Maysun rarely had a moment to herself, since she cared for them while maintaining the house and cooking the meals for her children and her husband, who worked at a grocery store nearby until late in the evenings. Even though Maysun was not the oldest woman on the block, she was not only Hanan's closest friend but Hanan viewed Maysun as a mother figure and often turned to her for permission and for advice.

Asma was one of Hanan and Maysun's close friends. Her house was halfway between Maysun's house and the house of her husband's parents. Asma was a very quiet woman in

public, so it took a great deal of time for me to get to know her well. A mother of two pre-school aged boys, she was in a similar situation to Maysun in that she did not have very much time to herself. She would bring her young boys to Hanan's house and let them play with Maysun's sons while the women sat and talked. She was the only woman on that corridor street that wore a burqa. Although she was Palestinian, she had not grown up inside of Amman New Camp. Instead, she moved there after marrying her husband, who brought her to live in his family home there. Her husband worked in a local jewelry shop selling dahab rusy, gold-plated jewelry, and he would frequently bring her items to wear and show off privately at home.

The three women spent time together almost every day, sitting in Hanan's living room or sitting on the steps in front of the house, chatting, running errands, and watching the children together. They frequently took care of each other's children, and even though Hanan did not have children, the children were close with her and would regularly come to visit her and spend time with her. Just like any friends, though, they bickered at each other and complained about each other from time to time. Nevertheless, it was more common to find them together than separated, and their friendship was very strong.

## **My Position**

The identity and position of the ethnographer is very important to understand the writing and perspective that drives the study. I did not conduct a native anthropology, since I am not from Jordan, and I am not from Wihdat. I chose Wihdat based largely on size and on the amount of time it had been in existence. Yet, before I even visited the camp, I was plagued with negative information about the Wihdat natives, whom all of my contacts in Jordan seemed to know *about* but not actually know. One of my closest friends in Amman insisted on taking me the first time I visited the camp, convinced that it was too dangerous for me to go there alone. Everyone from my neighborhood counseled me not to go to the refugee camp. As my neighbor

told me, “Al-nās fī al-Wihdat mush kūaysīn.”<sup>3</sup> It was evident to me that there was a glaring distrust of Palestinian refugees, not just of those in Wihdat, but of all refugees living in refugee camps. This distrust, I came to find, went both ways. In the first month of my research, I felt as if I stuck out like a sore thumb because my status as an outsider was very apparent in the way I comported myself, in my language, my ethnicity, and in my dress. Some people thought I was a spy for a while, and others did not know what to think of me. I became especially aware of this as I walked through the streets of Wihdat with Mohammad the first day, people stopping him along the way to ask him who I was and what I was doing there. He would speak for me, informing them of my intent, and they would noticeably relax and many even smile and engage me in a conversation, probing me even further about my interest and intent. Early on, the families with whom I was close began to protect me from what they saw as my cultural difference and recklessness, escorting me in the evenings, informing me of which areas and people to avoid, and even though I always felt safe and never had a situation that was uncomfortable, their attempt to protect me and keep me in certain parts of the community ultimately shaped the experience that I had based on their own perceptions of safety and danger.

Although my ethnicity was an area of divide that separated me from the subjects of the study, class and religion were potentially more relevant divides than my ethnicity. A key experience came during one of my first visits to Wihdat, in which I was approached by a few girls that were standing by my car as I arrived.

As I was walking up to the car, they asked me, “Are you Muslim?” When I said no, they said “We pray to Allah, who do you pray to?” I said I pray to “the same Allah.” They were shocked and exclaimed, “How can you pray to Allah and not be Muslim?” I told them that I was a Christian, and they asked me, “Do you pray like this?” after which they made the sign of the cross on their bodies. I told them that there are different kinds of Christians, to which they just laughed and changed the subject by looking at my phone

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<sup>3</sup> ألناس في الوحدات مش كويسين – colloquial Arabic translates to “The people in Wihdat are not good”

and asking me, “Are you rich?” When I said no, they said, “You have a phone and you have a car, and you say you are not rich?” I responded, “No, I am not rich.” They proclaimed, “Well, you *look* rich!”

The experience that I had with those girls helped put my place in perspective and helped me to understand how I was perceived. As time passed, my relationship with the families quickly became familial, their children even calling me “Khalty” (aunt), a term of both respect and endearment. However, despite my eventual closeness with the families I knew, there was never any debate over whether I was different and it did not change the power dynamics of the relationships I had developed. First, not only was I a graduate student who had time to spend in a refugee camp without having a job or income, but I was free to move around as I wished, and I could leave the refugee camp whenever I wanted, a luxury most of the families with whom I interacted did not have because of their political and economic status. Second, I was not a Muslim, which by extension meant that I did not adhere to the same conventions of dress and, more broadly, conventions of conduct, as the women with whom I surrounded myself.

Despite my intimate relationships with the families, it would be wrong to think that the differences that existed between us did not matter. Had I been a different person, it is possible that there are pieces of information that I might have seen simply because of who I was. Yet, the opposite is also true, since my relationship with the families was unique and allowed me a particular perspective that had I been someone else, I might not have had. As an active participant observer, it is inevitable that the study was affected, since even though I would like to think that every situation would have occurred just as so in my absence, my presence influenced the way that we interacted, just as their identities affected the interaction as well. While my research and findings cannot be seen as an absolute and objective truth, they do reflect a community that does exist and this paper can be and should be read as my observations combined with my interpretation of those events which reflect “‘a’ true version rather than ‘the’ true version and emphasize[s] that truth, like reality, is not singular” (Chin, 23).

## Consuming Clothing

I walk with Hanan through the throngs of people in the sūq on our way back to her house after having bought some meat at the meat market. She is wearing her abaya and a pair of heels, moving relatively quickly and wiggling past the other people who are stopping at stores and at arabayat to look at clothing. As we arrive back at her house, she closes the gate and begins to take off her hijab and her abaya, revealing her outfit underneath. She is wearing tight jeans and a quarter length sleeve top with a V-neck. I do not have a lot of time to appreciate it, though, since it seems as though as quickly as she takes off her abaya, she covers herself again, stepping into her hijab al-salāa and opting to change her heels for a pair of slippers. I ask her why she changed again, and she just smiles and responds, “You never know when someone will come in.”

The process that Hanan went through to change clothing was not uncommon, as it is something the other women did as well. There was an understanding that there was certain clothing that was used publicly and other clothing that was not appropriate for public appearances and was instead left to be enjoyed in the private domain of one’s home. It is, as a result, space and place which dictated norms related to attire, and it is impossible to understand fashion in Wihdat without addressing the distinctions between the public, private, and semi-private spaces.

Clothing in fashion consumerism has remained to be a significant multidisciplinary element in research (Crane and Bovone, 2006; Skov and Melchior, 2008). It represents one of the most studied forms of fashion and consumption. Many sociologists, including Simmel and Bourdieu have analyzed clothing’s distinguishing functions, that is; the way that clothing is used to create different meanings in fashion. Veblen (1899: 84;86) establishes a clear view of status symbols that are applicable to the consumption of clothing – people consume clothing not for fulfilling basic human needs but to symbolize their position in social classes. The choices that we



The display of clothing in the market reflected some of the notions of the shopping mall as established in studies that investigate the idea of the shopping within such environments. They represent places of spectacle, but they also contrastingly threaten the consumer by bending her to their will (Jackson & Thrift, 210). The consumer is brought to single or multiple enclosures that tend to popularize the notion of variety in order to motivate decisions that seek to exploit “choice” when in actual sense; the bounds of the environment serve to limit free choice. The consumer is however often presented with numerous objects with more features than can be accommodated within the limits of individual tastes and this helps to establish the very notion of freedom as is expressed through the resulting purchases.

The marketplace also enriches our understanding of how sub-locational aspects of fashion are brought into play. It has a vast array of stores, with different kinds of stores that are meant to cater for different tastes and preferences, and each person is expected to select the store that appeals to him/her. This allure reflects an intelligence in the special strategies employed by store owners and local business people, who strategically place themselves in the most opportune locations to attract the most customers through the consumption that occurs just by walking by and desiring something in the window. Al-nādy Street was known for having stores specializing in clothing, scarves, and many home furnishings and curtains. Al-Lidāwy Street had many stores with clothing, several of which reminded me of Goodwill, as they were mostly imported clothing items typically displaying some kind of logo of a university or company. On one occasion, I came across a sweatshirt that had the University of Minnesota logo and another Disneyworld t-shirt. I often lingered around to see who would walk into these stores, and most of the gently used clothing was bought by men, both old and young. After much of my time there, I came to conclude that it was because of the lettering on the clothing. Women were less likely to wear clothing with logos across the chest, as it would draw attention to the *wrong* area, even in a more private setting. Despite many locales being inside of buildings, the arabayāt complicated the geographical structure of the marketplace, since they would be



scattered throughout the passageways, flaunting the items for customers to see as they made their way through the suq. Consumers facilitate the actualization of the sub-locational aspects of fashion by creating shopping behaviors and habits. The marketplace is therefore thronged with customers on a daily basis, mothers pulling their children by the hand to stay together, and older women making their way through the teenagers that just left school and are joking around on the small streets. The congestion reflects the reality of the camp—walking around in the small unpaved streets filled with stores is the distraction of the day, it's the leisure activity that marks an excursion for the family during the afternoons. It constitutes a social trend and a collection of consumption behaviors that characterize consumption in marketplaces. The business owners use shops and carts (*arabayat*) that also serve as stores to allocate space and which also provide them with opportunities to input the final labor that maintains commodities in a state that can be sold. Exemplary forms of labor that are reflected therefore include the acquiring (procuring) of commodities, creating attractive displays, sorting, and securing merchandise.

## **Public Spaces**

Islamic clothing dominates the consumption of fashionable clothing in Wihdat. Even though there are countless stores that sell women's clothing that reveals the legs or reveals the arms, this is the main form of clothing that is seen throughout the camp. However, women do purchase other forms of clothing. Hanan had explained to me that women possess many items that remain unseen until one is invited into their private space, and as such; outsiders would never see because they remain hidden under their traditional dress, the abayat. While there is no specific number of abayas that they are supposed to have, Hanan always makes it a point to have at least two in her closet. Maysun has two as well. Saeda has six or seven, though I only ever saw her wear three different ones.

Simmel contended that the power of fashion was unbearable in religion because it is thought that religion is the subject only of objective decisions, right and wrong, for example,

which is guided by a moral, not by trends. Yet, religion still has a role to play in that fashion has coopted religion in a sense, making particular forms of religious attire *fashionable* despite religion at its core standing in absolute opposition to the development of fashion as it is conceived today. The role of fashion here was very clear and it was always visible in places that I spent most of the time for I never saw a person that was walking without some form of head covering and some form of Islamic attire. The result of this forging between religion and fashion has been a growth in an “Islamic consumer sector,” which encourages Muslims to be “both covered and fashionable, modest and beautiful” (Gokariksel and Secor, 119). As you walk through the suq and the camp at-large, you see a majority of women wearing abayat. Yet, despite the abayat being black, they were all different in the accents that they had, whether colored accents or beads, sparkles, as well as other details. The women’s consumption habits of public attire are very intertwined with their religious awareness and the religion’s articulation on women’s conduct in different spaces.



*Figure 3 A selection of abayat placed at the entrance to a store at the end of the alley*

The role of clothing in the consumption of fashion that occurs along social classes need not be generalized towards advancing an understanding of fashion as class-based forms of consumption because one of the dangers of talking about fashion is that there is not one fashion, there are multiple fashions at each level of culture. There is a risk of applying one’s understanding of fashion, whether it is Western fashion or “world fashion” to a unique situation

in which it might not be applicable. The alternative is not, however, to abandon terms like world fashion, but instead; we should build on the concept of the micro culture that was developed by McCurdy, Spradley, and Shandy, which identifies three levels of cultural systems: micro cultures, cultures, and macro cultures: these are accompanied by different kinds of aesthetic systems: street styles and local dress practices (at the micro cultural level), ethnic dress and national dress (at the cultural level), and world fashions (at the macrocultural level). This allows us to recognize multiple "world fashion" systems associated with different macro cultures—Western, but also Islamic, African, Asian, Latino, and many more (which may or may not currently have their own world fashions, but could in the future). (Akou, 408).

Islamic fashion is distributed in markets for the values added in accessories and the value attached to the design in its ability to uphold a range of perceived Islamic values. As such, the detail and quantity of the stones determined the price, and there were said to be different style abayat, from the traditional to the gulf style. There were even abayat that were not black, though those were very rare to see sold to customers, as they apparently “drew too much attention.” There is also a unique situation in the case of religiosity of Islam, where I was told by the men that the women should not be looked at because she is a gem that needs to be protected. This almost appears to be at odds with the notion of fashion that is tied to the “feminine” as something to look at. Even more so, there is an entire movement of literature that criticizes the consumer culture as a system that dictates that a woman “is nothing more than the commodities she wears: the lipstick, the tights, the cloths and so on are “woman” (Radner 86).

During one of first visits to Boutique Abeed, the store owner showed me around and took me upstairs to see the various Islamic fashions available. I asked him, “What is the difference between the jilbāb and the abaya?” He responded by telling me that the abaya is worn in the summer and is usually black, like in Saudi Arabia or in the Emirates, they are the khaliji style. It is a very light material that moves easily. The jilbāb is a heavier material so it is worn in the winter and brings warmth. “But if you are a true Muslim, you wear the jilbāb and not an

abaya,” he told me. When I asked why, he said “because the abaya shows your curves and the jilbāb does not allow people to see your body.” Yet, in spite of many men having similar thoughts regarding the abaya, it still remained the more prevalent choice, the vast majority of women wearing abayat not only because they viewed the black as a slenderizing choice but because it was the coolest option in a hot environment.

In West Amman, most veiled women wear what is referred to as a “buff” underneath it in order to give the illusion that they have more hair. There are various things people wear underneath it, but the ones I most commonly have seen are large flower clips that you put in your hair. However, most of the women that I encountered in Wihdat either used a very small buff or none at all. Maysun’s daughter Leila and I discussed the hijab fashions in Wihdat, and she mentioned that schools mandate girls do not use a buff underneath their hijabs. If a girl wears one, she is forced to take it off and then is reprimanded. Nevertheless, the desire among younger girls to use buffs is significant, as Leila mentioned “when school finishes, all of the girls go to the bathroom and add the buff to their hair before leaving so that the boys see them with the buff outside.” Dress and fashion can be a form of communicating identity externally, but they can also affect the self by physically and spiritually as dressing repeatedly in a particular fashion can create a routine and a way of acting.

It would then be a mistake to view Islamic fashion and clothing as a resistance to Westernization and fashion, as the Islamic fashion can also form a globalized fashion that is emulated and combined with local fashion preferences. In the case of the hijab, one might view the hijab as a world Islamic fashion, and the buff as a local fashion preference that just modifies the way that a person interacts and adopts said fashion. “Islamic attire has transformed from being an austere marker of resistance to Westernization and upper-class pretensions to a new form of “*embourgeoisement*” with the aspirations for social inclusion that this entails. While the ethnic look functions as a status marker, Islamic chic has become a new means to social elevation” (Abaza, 282). In Wihdat, just like in the Western-world fashion that is based around

specific cities, designers, publications, and even particular styles of clothing, there are also certain aspects of fashion that remain privileged and unchanging—hijab, khimar, dishdash, smagh, etc—because they are linked to teachings of the Prophet Mohammad and the Qur'an.

The role of Turkey in Fashion can be highlighted to enrich the context of the flow of ideas in Islamic fashion. In fact, much of the clothing in the refugee camp, especially what is deemed to be better quality than the articles of clothing that come from China, comes from Turkey. This is significant because Turkey occupies a large role in fashion not only in the Islamic world, but also in the West. In Turkey, for example, where women struggle for the freedom to cover their heads and still participate in an adamantly secular public life, "Islamic-style clothing stores and fashion shows, fitness and beauty centres targeted specifically at modern Islamist women have become commonplace" (Akou, 405).

Even though my primary focus in the investigation was to look at women's fashions, I found that the presence of Turkish attire was prevalent in the male clothing as well. One of the more popular and high quality stores for men's clothing, Jamal, was known as having a selection of sweaters and ties that were imported from Turkey and Syria. Jamal, the first male clothing store in the camp, according to Mohammad and the worker who told me the store opened in 1967, sets the fashion trends inside of Wihdat. Even though McCracken uses the term "opinion leaders" to refer to celebrities and other individuals held in high esteem, the concept can be extended to the fashions that are being produced and sold by Jamal fashions, as Mohammad told me, "Clothing that comes from Turkey and Syria is considered higher quality clothing than that which is brought from China or even that which is made in Jordan."



*Figure 4 Men's clothing at Jamal, which carries brands from Turkey and Syria*

In the 1980s, the *tessetür* fashion arose in Turkey, though it was characterized of mainly “boxy ankle-length overcoats and large patterned scarves drawn tightly around the face and draped over the neck and shoulders.” (Gøkariksel and Secor, “Between Fashion,” 121) Yet, since then, there has been a boom in Islamic fashion worldwide. In this rise, there is an image that accompanies the veil, which is the image of a cosmopolitan lifestyle that “embraces covered women within the pleasures of consumption, personal style, and beauty.” (Gokariksel and Secor, “Between Fashion,” 144). Similar to the rise in Turkey, there are many young women in Yemen who cover their head simply because it is customary to do so, not because it is an issue of piety. As a part of the globalized consumption, the different styles of clothing are widely available for purchase in the local markets. According to Moors, “the choices these women make about what to wear and what not to wear are not driven by considerations of piety. Rather, while staying within the boundaries of what is acceptable in their own social circles, many of them go for the newest and most cosmopolitan models in the market.” (Moors, 341)

Leila’s comments regarding the hijab reflect the individualization of fashion trends while still following the societal norms within *Wihdat*. Furthermore, the varied selections of abayat and

jalabīb create space in which the consumer can personalize their experience with the forces of consumption. Nevertheless, while women in West Amman normally dressed with the intended effect of standing out and being noticed, women in Wihdat strived to blend in as opposed to standing out in public spaces. Women would wear colors, clothing, to be unique, just not unique *enough* to generate attention. As a result, the public attire resembles something akin to a uniform—the basics are the same but they add little details to personalize them. This, in turn, provides the appearance of homogeneity as it becomes difficult for an outsider to tell the economic status of a person simply by admiring the public attire given the women's desire to blend. Nevertheless, the heterogeneity becomes increasingly pronounced as women move into more private spaces and out of the marketplace.

### **Semi-Private and Private Spaces**

For the women in the alley, having to wear an abaya is a burden and a hassle that is not comfortable. Not only do they verbalize their discontent, but it is also reflected in their lack of desire to wear it and their eagerness to remove it when wearing it. However, the need to be able to cover oneself is a constant uncertainty as, in the words of Maysun, “you don't know when someone might show up and you need to cover your head.”

I am choosing to use the phrase semi-private to refer to the corridor on which the houses are, because the women typically dressed differently when moving around from house to house than when they went past the corridor and into the general public areas. It was in these semi-private spaces that women opted to wear their hijab al-salāa, a prayer outfit, to move around and to entertain the closest guests at home. The hijab al-salāa also served as a quick fix solution when the women were in the private confines of their homes because they could reach for that and put it on much quicker than trying to put on their hijab. Especially at Hanan's house, at which people knocked and entered without waiting for an answer, she did not have time to change, so she just kept her hijab al-salāa close by so she could cover in the time it took

the person to knock and open the door to enter. Despite the inconvenience, and despite Hanan many times complaining about people just walking in and her lack of privacy, she enjoyed being a haven for the neighborhood kids to come and play, and for her friends to come and visit.

When women were in their private spaces, their homes, they enjoyed showing off their varied attire. Hanan's brother Mahmoud worked in a shop that sold clothing. The women in the corridor took advantage of his access and often requested he find good clothing for them. This happened most with his sister, of course, because she relied on him almost exclusively for the purchase of her clothing. Hanan would either stop by the store to look around and let her brother know which clothing she liked and wanted, or she would let her brother bring new models home and look over them at home and decide what she wanted and what she did not. He also did this for Hanan's friends Maysun and Asma, who similarly wanted to avoid the hassle of having to go the store, if they could.

Clothing is a medium for conceptualizing women in particular ways. For example, the way that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, women fashioned themselves as women, mothers, workers, and spouses (McCracken, 136). A famous example of this fashion experiment is bloomers, inspired by the pantaloons from Turkey, which became an article of clothing that not only represented reform in fashion, but also became synonymous with women's rights in the United States in the 1850s. Simmel made the claim, "From the fact that fashion as such can never be generally in vogue, the individual derives the satisfaction of knowing that, as adopted by him or her, it still represents something special and striking; while at the same time the individual feels inwardly supported by a broad group of persons who are striving for the same thing, and not, as is the case for other social satisfactions, by a group that is doing the same thing" (Simmel, 193). Women engage actively in the fashion clothing consumption both as creators and as re-inventors of norms and priorities of consumption.

One afternoon, I stopped by Hanan's house to find that her brother had just dropped off various outfits for Hanan at her request after going to his store. He had



brought two pairs of wide-legged pants, one with a golden chain “belt” attached to the front half of the pants. Along with the pants, he brought a bright orange blazer and two tops, one slightly baggier than the other. He also brought two handbags, and although both of them were black they had different designs. Hanan was tasked with selecting the items that she liked and wanted to keep. As I sat in her living room, Asma came in and invited me to go to her house. Asma and I arrived to her house to find her living room occupied by her friends from the neighborhood, most of whom I know only in passing. Hanan followed shortly thereafter, walking into Asma’s house roughly fifteen minutes later, her new clothing in hand. She said her salutations and then exclaimed: “Look what my brother brought for me today!” She proceeded to showcase the different outfits, mixing and matching the tops with the bottoms and asking for the women’s opinions. At the conclusion, Hanan bragged to everyone in the room how lucky she was that her brother had managed to pick up all of the clothing that she requested.

That particular scenario illustrates the complexity of fashion, since it strives to receive acceptance and envy simultaneously. Whatever is considered to be good is associated with legitimate consumption behavior but then the people who fail to actualize it may enforce a level of illegitimacy through envy as those who perform it present their consumption to them. It is therefore also intended to cause envy on the part of the rest of the group, since the person is envied for the fashionable possessions, but also seeks approval and receives it as a member of a collective, in this case, the group of women that are friends and share their lives together.

Clothing is a clear demonstration of the dynamic nature of fashion – something comes into fashion as quickly as it goes out of fashion, but who determines what is *in* fashion?

According to McCracken:

“This invention is undertaken by “opinion leaders” who help shape and refine existing cultural meaning, encouraging the reform of cultural categories and principles. These are “distant” opinion leaders: individuals who by virtue of birth,

beauty, celebrity, or accomplishment, are held in high esteem. These groups and individuals are sources of meaning for those of lesser standing” (McCracken, 80).

In the case of this study, the women frequently referred to personalities on television as a guide to their “in home” attire demonstrating that; even within a space of poverty, there still exists pressure to spend money in many ways. It is a pressure socially because the consumption of goods makes it easier to fit in by standing out (distinction and difference), and it is a systemic pressure because the companies who sell are selling the image of the “good life,” which requires consuming particular ideas and objects.

## **Palestinian Nationalism**

It is not unusual to walk through the refugee camp and see older women wearing traditional Palestinian dresses. Yet, of the people that I spent most of my time, Sa’eda’s mother was the only person that wore Palestinian dresses on a semi-daily basis. “I get all of my dresses downtown, not in Wihdat. The quality of the dresses is better there than it is here because the materials are better,” she once told me as we discussed the significance of her dresses. “You know,” she said, “every dress comes from a special part of Palestine.” She took out ten dresses that she had and showed them to me, pointing out the intricacies of the stitching and embroidery.

In McCracken’s book, he contends that clothing can be a way in which cultural categories become encoded and made manifest. Furthermore, he states that it can mark a transition from one cultural category to another during a rite of passage. Although the dresses belonged to Sa’eda’s mother, they were collected and preserved with the intent of passing them down to Sa’eda to wear once she was older.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, “handmade and richly embroidered women’s garments expressed regional identity at the same time as they marked age and status”

(Saca, 13). The dresses as well as the headdresses were traditionally made by the Bedouin and villagers of a particular area. The history of the Palestinian garments is particularly fascinating due to its social importance and influence:

Before the middle of the twentieth century, women in each local region created garments with distinctive types of embroidery and decoration that immediately established the wearer's origin. To those who knew the regional variations in style, patterns, and colors of embroidery, a quick look at a dress was enough to determine the wearer's region and even village. Marital status was also expressed through specific styles of garments that distinguished unmarried girls, married women, widows, and women who wished to remarry. *Thobs* (the generic term for a dress- like garment) and headdresses were also excellent communicators of wealth and social standing. (Saca, 13).

Despite the disruption to the traditions in Palestine that occurred as a result of the formation of Israel in 1948, many women in Wihdat would embroider in the original style of their villages as a way of maintaining and preserving a connection to their identity, village, and heritage. Yet, as time passed and families continued to live in refugee camps, regional distinctions mattered less than the common identity as Palestinians, and so the fashion of the traditional Palestinian dresses changed to include symbols of national identity such as the Dome of the Rock, the colors of the Palestinian flag, and the word "Palestine" (Saca, 39).



Figure 5 Makbata Sabiyyana lilmutarizāt store window

When asking people about the mutarizāt, I was always told to visit ‘makhīṭa sābiyyanā lilmutarizāt’, which, according to the residents of Wihdat, is very famous both among Palestinians inside and outside of Wihdat. Aside from that store, however, most of the stores that sold the garments are located outside of the refugee camp. One man told me that material that they received inside of the camp was not good quality since most of the things inside the camp were cheaper. And, it is true, most of the stores that sold them had less foot traffic than other stores that were selling the more “mainstream” styles of clothing. Aside from that one popular store that sold Palestinian clothing, there were not many other locals that had traditional Palestinian attire. In fact, the older women were the only ones that I saw wear them. There was an absence of Palestinian folklore among the younger residents of Wihdat, likely because most of them were part of the generation that was born in Jordan and followed global fashion trends that were not aligned to a specific location and/or country.

## **Hanan’s Khutba**

Hanan and I went to go look at engagement dresses. A suitor had come to Hanan’s house to ask for her hand in marriage. “Is he the same man that you told me about before that you didn’t like?” I asked her when she told me the news. “Yes,” she responded, “but I did like him. I did not tell you because I did not think that he liked me.” Although she was very excited, her brothers have not made a decision yet as to whether or not they will let Hanan accept the proposal. Still, Hanan was so excited when I arrived to see her that she asked me to go look at dresses with her.

We went to visit many different stores to see the dresses. There was a variety in each store that we visited, though they were all rental dresses. “Does everyone in Wihdat rent their engagement dress?” I asked Hanan as we walked into the third store. “Yes,” she quickly responded as she continued to be mesmerized by every dress she saw. The styles of engagement dresses varied greatly. Dresses could be found in almost any and every color. One store, ‘taysīr sintir’, had a whole floor dedicated to party dresses, and half of that floor was engagement

dresses. Despite the variety in design, the vast majority of engagement dresses had wire sewn into the inside of the dress itself to make it retain its shape in lieu of using a wired petticoat under the dress.

When Maysun, Asma, Sa'eda, Hanan and I spoke about the issue of the dress rentals, I asked them if there were any dresses that were sold. Sa'eda quickly said "No, not in Wihdat. It's too expensive to buy a dress, so we just rent them." Maysun added, "All of Jordan rents the dresses except the top one percent of the population, which has their dresses imported from Europe or America."

Perhaps one of the symbolic convergent element of fashion consumption that spans home and body consumption is the consumption of items related to engagements. Inside of Wihdat, many stores have party attire. Just among the families with whom I spent my time, I knew or knew of half a dozen couples who were having khuṭbas during my stay there. Thus, it was not at all surprising to see so many party dresses.

Hanan's brothers and father finally agreed to the arrangement between her and her future fiancé, Omar. "Come to my house so you can meet Omar!" she pleaded to me on the phone. "Will you come with us to see the salon that Omar has found for our engagement party?" I drove to Hanan's house and met her, Omar, and Maysun; we all drove to the salon, which was outside of Wihdat close to the freeway. When we arrived, the representative showed us the dance floor and the tables, and the love seat at the front of the room where they would sit during the party. Although Hanan and Omar had been unaffectionate in front of her brothers, both of them relaxed and acted more affectionate once we were in the salon together.

When we returned to Wihdat, Omar left and Hanan took me to visit a beauty salon that was just a few blocks away from her house that she liked to frequent sometimes. We walked into the small salon to see a few women waiting while the 3-4 women that worked there (no older than 22), were sitting and chatting about their lives. I looked at the pictures of women that were on the wall who had been to the salon, and I asked why their faces looked so white. One of the

women in the salon told me that it was a powder that women used for celebrations to make their faces look whiter than normal. Hanan mentioned that she did not like it and that Omar told her that he likes her natural without a lot of makeup, so she would do something simple for their party.

When it came time to Hanan's engagement, everyone was extremely excited, since, at least to Maysun, she was part of the family. However, with Maysun and Sa'id's budget so tight, Maysun did not feel that she could buy clothing for all of her children. Tina (Filistyn) was going to wear a miniature version of the dress Hanan would wear herself for the Khutba, and Hanan's brother was going to buy Maysun an outfit. Leila and Dana, however, had nothing to wear. Because Dana and I were roughly the same size, I suggested that she try some of my clothing. I took a few blazers since they wouldn't have to fit perfectly. As it turned out, they thought the clothing was too grown-up for her, so Maysun ended up buying an outfit for her, since all she had was t-shirts and exercise pants.



*Figure 6 Maysun's family takes a photo with Hanan during her khutba*

Hanan's khutba was a very beautiful party. I stopped by the camp to pick up Maysun and her children so that they could come with me to the party. While there wasn't enough room for everyone in my car, we divided between my car and another of their friends' car. The party was on the third floor of a party building, and there was some dancing and I was able to meet a lot of people that I had not met before. Omar was the only man in the section with the women for a little bit, and then he left and the women were alone. Some of the younger girls wore short

dresses with very high heels, while other women dressed more modestly and casually. I think it depended on how close the person was to Hanan – mainly the women who were dressed in evening dresses were Omar's sisters. After the khutba, the close relatives went back to Hanan's house for an after party in which Mohammad was playing the drums, and Hanan was dancing in the middle of their living room while the rest of the guests watched, occasionally jumping in and dancing with her.

## Consuming Homes

Hanan opened the door and invited me into her house for the second time. It was still light outside so she asked me if I wanted to see the backyard, and took me to see it. It was a large backyard with a lemon tree that provides lemons to their household as well as their neighbors' families. I glanced at the tree, and next to it there appeared to be a pile of trash.

Me: "What is that?"

Hanan: "Trash."

Me: "Why do you have trash in your backyard?"

Hanan: "Because we are the only house on the street that has a big area, and we collect the trash and they pick it up from our house."

Me: "When do they come to pick it up?"

Hanan: "A few times a year, we call someone to come and collect it."

In the growing pile of trash in the backyard stood a large store sign that had been disposed. As the conversation progressed, Hanan informed me that there were no dumpsters or other places in which they could dispose of large trash, so they were forced to keep it until someone could come and get it.

Studies that focus on the home as a site of consumption emphasize its importance in the study of identity, as the home is a sanctuary where tastes are developed and preserved and also where the ultimate value of consumption is brought into play. In the case of Wihdat, there is a distinction between the home-structure in which they lived at the time of this study which they had known since childhood, and the home-land which they viewed as the distant Palestine to which they collectively longed to return as a people. I mention this because the term *home* develops a unique meaning, as the houses built in Wihdat were intended to be transitory but have been treated increasingly as permanent by its residents. Most of the families have been in Wihdat since childhood if not their entire lives. The few remaining individuals that did once live



in Palestine and suffered the relocation have accepted Wihdat as their current home and the cement walls in which they lived as their house and, ultimately, also their home.

All consumption that is completed through the establishment of homes also contributes to the value that will be ultimately consumed in the consumption of homes. Homes are therefore presenting a sophisticated element of consumption. In fashion consumption, homes are designed to appear fashionable and also to contain fashionable commodities. What we can say about clothing we can also talk about the home as a site of consumption but on a larger scale or higher level of sophistication. Just as clothing serves as an expression of the self, the house also has a way of sharing what is most personal to a person, as "...most of what matters to people is happening behind the closed doors of the private sphere" (Miller, *Behind Closed Doors*, 1). Miller's contention that most of what happens occurs behind the closed doors of the private sphere illustrates the need to look at the way in which the home represents a space in which people increasingly pay attention to "its structure, its decoration, its furnishing and the arrays of objects that fill its spaces, and they reflect back on it their agency and sometimes their impotence." (Miller, *Behind Closed Doors*, 1).

As an exemplary exploration of consumption roles for women in the home, this is the case used among the households that I visited. Drawing from Miller's description of women who traditionally stay at home as "housewives" in which he argues that there are traditionally normative expectations that accompany this term in the *Consumption as the Vanguard*:

1. "The housewife may stand as the key figure in both my negative and positive reading of the historical position of contemporary consumption. She commands the fate of developing countries as one of poverty or relative affluence. But she also commands the progressive activity by which consumption is used to extract culture as the self-construction of humanity from the intractable but essential institutions of the modern world, such as the market or bureaucracy" (Miller, *Consumption as the Vanguard*, 34)

2. Given this responsibility that is ascribed to her, sometimes without her knowing, the process of consuming may be pleasurable for the women while also being a source of anxiety, since they are responsible for provisioning for the family. The women are responsible for ensuring that the small amount of money that they have will be spent in a way that maximize the food/other items they might need for the house. (thrift)

The roles of the women therefore come out as to be well cut-out in the home – both in the conversations that they engage in and in the actions they perform. When I was sitting with Maysun and Hanan discussing my apartment in Amman, they asked me about the kitchen. The first thing they wanted to know was how many “ayūn” it had. Maysun only has a two-plated hotplate and doesn’t have an oven. Hanan had a 4-plated stove with an oven, but the only thing that worked was one of the plates. She told me it is so hard to cook with only one plate, because everything takes longer since you have to wait for each thing to finish cooking before you can do something else on the stove (each step can only be done one at a time). In my accounts of the homes, I place women at the center of the conversation, following in Miller’s analysis of the housewife. Although that term does not apply to Hanan, for example, his working definition—a woman being responsible for the wellbeing of the home—applies to all of the women in my study.

## Hanan's House



*Figure 7 Door to Hanan's house*

The walls outside of Hanan's house were light blue, and the door was comprised of two brown doors whose right side with the handle was the only side that opened. Islamic graffiti was on most of the cement around the house. Once one entered through the front door, there was a window to the left that gave view to the kitchen, and just past the window was the entrance to the covered part of the house. There was a small outdoor bathroom, similar to an outhouse except it connected to piping. It did not have a light, however, so it was hard to use at night. Furthermore, it did not have any running water. In order to flush, there was a small pitcher next to the toilet that was used to flush any residue away. Since there was no running water, the person using the restroom would need to enter the kitchen in order to wash his or her hands.

In addition to the small outdoor bathroom, the house had a large backyard with a lemon tree in the middle of it that actually did produce lemons that they and their neighbors would use for cooking. According to the story that Hanan told me, the tree had been there for a very long time, but the resident that lived in the house before her family did not care for the tree, so it died. As soon as Hanan's family moved there and cared for it, it began to grow back and provided lemons since that day. In addition to the junk space mentioned earlier, their backyard had a concrete, unfinished room (reflected in the bottom left hand side of the image). Their plan

Hand-drawn floor plan of a house in Arabic. The plan shows a central living area (صالون) with a fireplace (موقد) and a television (تلفزيون). To the left is a kitchen (مطبخ) with a sink (حوض) and a refrigerator (ثلاجة). To the right is a bedroom (غرفة نوم) with a bed (سرير) and a wardrobe (خزانة). A bathroom (حمام) is located at the bottom left. The house is surrounded by a garden (حديقة) with a tree (شجرة) and a lawn (عشب). The entrance is labeled 'دخول' (Entrance).

use, the kitchen was on the left and

that they possessed of anyone in the family. He told me the story of that picture many times—the king arriving to the refugee camp and visiting the Camp Committee and ultimately meeting Mohammad. Mohammad requested someone take a picture of them, and he printed it and framed it for keepsake.

There was one bedroom, which was adjacent to the salon. In it were the closet, a mirror, and extra blankets and farshāt. In essence, the room served as storage space for the bedding and the clothing, but Hanan, Mohammad, and Mahmoud would take their blankets and pillows and sleep on the farshāt in the evenings, sometimes in the salon, sometimes on the extra ones found in the bedroom. They were economical in this respect, as the farshāt served as both seating and bedding depending on the need at that time and, ultimately, saved space. The prioritization of the need of an object that can serve two functions versus the desire to have particular furniture exemplifies the constant struggle between needs and wants that is important to address in questions of consumption of the home. The modern household is a process in flux—it is a site of social relations, of class politics, and history. By looking at home decoration as a practice, we can investigate the intersection of interests with class, gender, and ethnicity through the understanding of ‘wants’ and ‘needs’ within a household. Individuals are able to interact with mega-structures of social strata from homes: Historically, the understanding of the house as an expressive medium was associated with the “consolidation and formation of middle-class identity” (Clarke).

However, in the current age, all classes engage the same medium, although perhaps different things are categorized as needs and wants, even within the same economic classes. They also create their own custom rules for involvement in consumption opportunities and as such; the home can be a site of exploitation or development depending on the social concerns of the families inhabiting it and their consumption patterns. Yet, the concept of ‘choice’ has to be evaluated with the conditions that affect that choice; the concept of a choice is a “limited condition that bears the burden of histories of social category formation in terms of class, gender

and other parameters, the normative adjudication of families and peers, and the pressure of business attempts to ensure their particular profitability.” (Miller, “Consumption as the Vanguard,” 36) This is especially true in a refugee camp, as the family seeks to maintain itself within a very limited range of resources and as such, more effort is expected to be relayed towards self-propulsion through the available social structures and stratifications.

As Hanan and I arrived back to her house one afternoon, she told me “I need to take a shower, because there is a soccer game this evening, and I will not be able to take a shower later.” Until that moment, I had not even considered the issue of bathing—where did they bathe if they did not have a bathroom? Hanan walked to the kitchen and began boiling water on the only stove plate that was still working. “Where will you shower?” I asked her, to which she responded, “I am going to shower in here!” I was confused what *in here* meant until I saw her take the sheer curtain that hung on the side of the kitchen entryway and close it, which did little to give her privacy given it was see-through. She went to the room to get a change a clothes, walked to the door leading the street and locked it, and then said, “Just stay where you are, I will not take very long.” After she finished showering, she mopped the floor in the kitchen and cleaned the pot in which she had prepared the water.

Hanan’s house was relatively modest in both size and décor. There were not any accents or decorations in the house. The money that she received was used on buying groceries for the house or on tobacco, both the tobacco needed for the father’s pipe or the tobacco needed for the daily session of argilah that her brothers had while watching the television in the evenings. After buying those things in addition to clothing and other necessities for the family, there was not very much money left over to buy décor, items that to them were wants and not needs.

## **Maysun’s House**

Maysun’s house was situated directly in front of Hanan’s house on the other side of the alley. Unlike Hanan whose home had a door to the street and a separate door to the house inside

the gate, Maysun's door was the door to the inside of her home. Similar to Hanan's exterior door, however, only one of the double doors opened, so people would enter through the right side of the doorway.



*Figure 9 Entrance to Maysun's house*

In an effort to provide privacy and compensate for the lack of an additional door, Maysun's house had a curtain hanging almost in front of the door. When someone would open the door, he or she would be unable to see into the living area without moving around the curtain. The curtain helped give her a few extra seconds between someone walking in and her covering herself if necessary. It also meant that even if the door were opened to the street, no one would be able to see into the house, subsequently preserving the privacy of the home.

Unlike Hanan's house, Maysun's house had a bathroom on the left side as one entered the house. Inside was an Arabic style toilet, a washing machine, and a handheld sprayer, that was utilized both in conjunction with the toilet and to shower. The drain from the toilet was the same drain that was used when showering, which is why they used the same handheld sprayer. Past the restroom one could see stairs, which led upstairs to an area that was still under construction, and they also led to a third level, which was the roof. Maysun's husband loved birds. As a result, they constructed a bird feeding area on the roof so that he could feed the birds

and watch them when he wanted. All of the birds from the area would fly to his house and he built concrete rooms with stands so that the birds could stand on them at leisure.

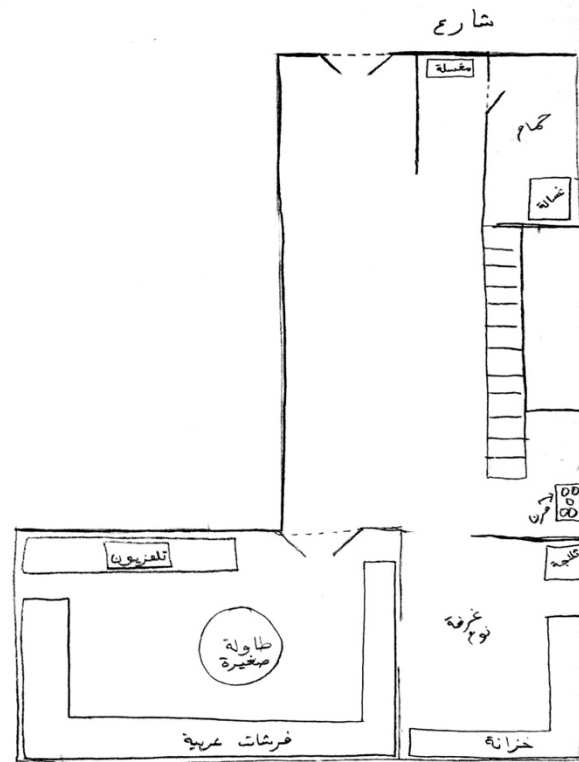


Figure 10 Hand drawn layout of Maysun's house

On the first floor, next to the stairs was a small and narrow kitchen with an oven and a sink to wash dishes. Maysun only had a hotplate and did not have an oven, which, she said, made it difficult to cook. Due to the size of the kitchen, her family kept the refrigerator in the bedroom, on the wall between the room and the kitchen. The rest of the wall in the bedroom was covered by closet space which was important, especially given the seven people living there. Each person in the home had his or her own door with a small space in which to keep clothing. There was a partial wall that divided the bedroom and the salon that had a square opening, which was only separated by a curtain from the salon. Frequently, the boys would go sit in the bedroom and lean over into the salon through the opening in order to avoid overcrowding in the room.

The salon was a larger room that contained mostly farshāt but also had a small plastic table in the middle which, during the time I spent in the camp, was used more times for games



and for Filistyn to dance on than as an eating space. Typically, meals were served on the floor and not on the table. Similar to the layout in Hanan's house, the salon in Maysun's house was arranged so that the television was the centerpiece, and it captured everyone in the room's attention, as it was on a great majority of the time, and usually loud enough that other conversations could not occur in competition with the show on the television.

Maysun's house, unlike Hanan's, had a second story. Maysun told me that the second story was not completed, but "there is not enough room to sit downstairs." In discussing what she would build on the second story, she told me she would build a "maṭbah amrīky" and a "hamām ifranjy"<sup>4</sup> and a sitting room. In the time that I spent there, there was no construction done on the second floor, but her and her husband were saving money so that she would be able to begin construction as soon as possible.

## Asma's House



Figure 11 Entrance to Asma's house from the corridor street

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<sup>4</sup> When Maysun used the phrase *maṭbah amrīky*, she was using it to refer to an open floor plan kitchen that traditionally opens to the sitting area and/or dining room. *Hamām ifranjy* referred to toilet seats on which one sits higher off of the ground instead of the Arabic style toilets that are in the ground.

I did not spend time with Asma until being already immersed in my project and research. Although I had met her on a few occasions in which she was visiting Hanan and Maysun, I did not know much about her. She had invited me several times to go drink tea at her house, but I was nervous about going given not only my shy nature, but what I perceived as lack of access since she wore the burqa.

I finally said yes to going to sit at Asma's house. I don't know what I thought her house would look like, but it didn't look like it. Her house had a large foyer, and was also two stories, though the second story was mainly a roof that was used for the kids to go and play. She had a living area with two small bedrooms immediately beyond the salon and a kitchen that was out of sight. What surprised me was to see a sofa, something that neither Hanan nor Maysun had in their house. In addition, both bedrooms were furnished with beds that had a frame.

Asma's house was most different from the homes of Maysun and Hanan. Not only was it not next to the other two homes—it was further up the alley—but it was also slightly larger and had different furnishings.

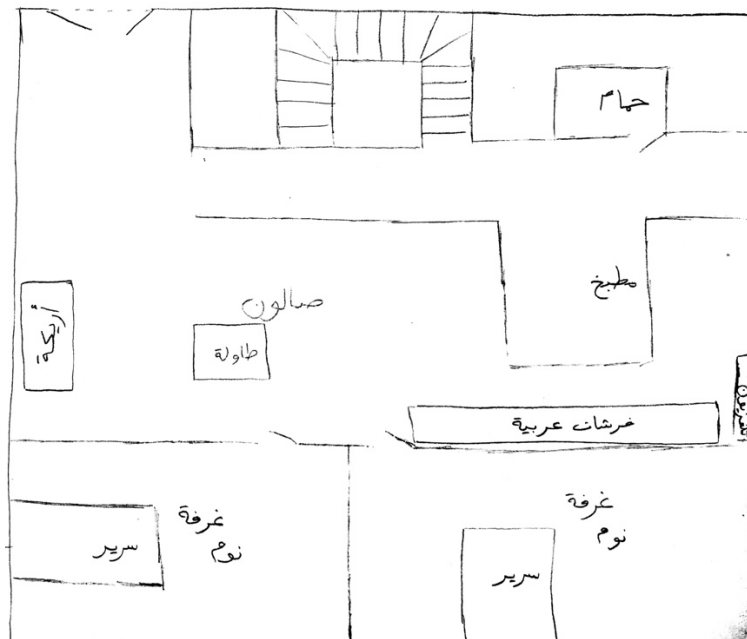


Figure 12 Hand drawn image of Asma's house

There were a few notable distinctions between the houses that I believe are worth mentioning. First, Asma's house had more than one bedroom. In fact, there were two bedrooms, one for her son, and the other for her husband and her. Even more significant is that in those rooms, they had beds instead of using the farshāt as a sleeping space. Although they had farshāt in the living area, they had traditional beds in the bedrooms on which they slept. Additionally, Asma had traditional sofas in her house. The farshāt were used only when there are too many people to sit on the furniture that she had in her salon, but otherwise, her guests would sit on the sofas, chairs, and other kinds of seating.

Although the distinctions between Asma, Maysun, and Hanan might appear to be trivial distinctions, they are at their foundation, a conversation between needs and wants. It would be a mistake to make a judgment about class based purely on adornment of the home and consumption practices, since as Miller aptly argues, needs and wants can vary by the consumer based on identity and judgment calculations of what things matter, and these discussions can, and sometimes do, occur outside of the purview of economic class.

### **A Note on 'Houses' and 'Homes'**

In the past, homes in Wihdat resembled tents with temporary status but the current homes are permanent structures, now characterized by their cement structure, but crammed on a tiny street. The amount of space that each house has is relatively little, but the families seem to differ in terms of how they use the space. While some families just have one room, some families have built more private spaces that have quarters. The context of individual homes shall be used to provide more accurate descriptions of the settings.

In exploring the relationship that exists between people and such commodities as homes the complexity encountered could reflect a dynamic process of the determination of needs and wants based on things that are prioritized over others. The houses in Wihdat were originally

intended to be temporary, but since the problems between Israel and Palestine haven't been resolved, the homes have become permanent. The relationship between the people and their homes, thus, is a reflection of this, since because the homes were constructed in 1948, many people have been in those homes over half a century. The permanency of homes is therefore an important aspect of long-term existence of people in societies. Moreover, people strive to build homes for themselves in order to actualize their consumption even in such crowded dwelling where houses are separated by very thin walls and are sometimes built on top of each other, reflecting Clarke's view that "the layout of the flats and the positioning of the windows make it impossible for passers-by to casually glance inside a tenant's flat. Despite this and the studied distancing from each other's affairs (with the exception of overtly public incidents) informants frequently try to envisage the interiors of one another's homes" (Clarke, 31).

The economic situation of the camp also places a limit on the consumption that can be actualized by the residents. Most houses don't have bathrooms or beds, though there are some that do. Of all the houses I entered during my stay in Wihdat, there were only two houses that had beds and they also had sofas. Abu Sa'ed's house is the most furnished house, which is seen by others as a sign of higher economic status than the neighbors. Many home owners can however be seen (and expected to be) reinforcing their structures, and also creating (or engaging in) the relations that are geared towards establishing or extending their homes:

The house is a site of constant upgrade, as media tells us that we must upgrade our houses to be in fashion by shopping for "furnishings and ideas and values regarding home and family life" (Clarke, 23-24)

The setting of homes relays a myriad of signs and symbols of the consumption that occurs therein and that which is also represented by such signs and symbols. In Wihdat, all bathrooms are traditionally 'hamām 'araby' toilets on the floor. I went to one house that had a western toilet (seat), but due to the scarcity of water, it was unusable since it could not be flushed. The 'farshāt' alternate between being seating and being beds. They are economic in this

respect and they also allow them to save space because they don't have to have both "traditional" furniture and farshāt. Many homes that I visited used these as both. They would simply use a blanket and sleep in the same place they had spent all day lounging. All the houses also have TVs, which are hardly ever off. Every home has satellite, and a few people share a USB that gives access to sports channels like Al-Jazeera Sports, so that they can watch the "fūṭbul" matches. Home owners interact with opportunities for extending or refining their consumption by exploring. During the World Cup, every guy I knew was desperate to watch the games. Since some of the games were only available on paid programming, Mohammad and his neighbor Ahmad "stole" the connection — they rotated their satellites to get the premium sports channels. Unfortunately, moving the satellite meant that they ended up losing access to other channels that had soap operas during the day. As a result, Hanan was left with watching infomercial channels during the day, so that Mohammad could have the TV ready when he got home. Mohammad would also invite his friends to come to the house to watch the games. As such, the consumption of homes transcends the consumption of physical commodities much easier than other forms of consumption because of its sign value as a point of building and validating relationships and because of the collective effort that can be harnessed from such relationships.

## Consuming Bodies

When I arrived at Maysun's house one day, I saw that Dana was wearing a face mask. She told me face masks were great for the skin because they helped to hydrate it and keep her looking young (she was fourteen at the time). Maysun joined the conversation and as we continued to speak about beauty and skincare, the conversation transitioned to the topic of weight loss and exercise. It is important to note that Maysun and her two oldest daughters all consider themselves to be slightly overweight. Maysun commented that she was very preoccupied about her two daughters' weights, scared that if they continued to grow larger, they would be unable to find a husband later in their lives. As I asked about exercise and their diet, Maysun informed me that there were no clubs for women to exercise inside of the camp. When I suggested going for a walk, the girls got dressed in sporty attire, and we decided to leave the house and walk. Six women went together and we managed to walk for ten minutes before Maysun expressed that we had walked too far and it could be dangerous, so we turned and walked back, leaving our exercise goal unfinished. It was evident that exercise and health, if present, needed to be in the private sphere of one's life instead of in public. The public sphere was already reserved for men's leisure time and the women seemingly could only enter that sphere with a specific purpose. Strolling for exercise felt as though it violated some non-spoken order.

Traditionally, fashion in the context of the body refers to beautification practices that include makeup and hygiene. Yet, the more insidious forms of body modification, which include exercise and dietary regimes, equally respond to the narrative of a fashionable body that, with a little effort, can align with the beauty ideals within the consumer culture. Consequently, the body, under the guise of fashion, becomes something consumable and regulated.

The body is the fundamental unit of all consumption. A study of consumption and consumerism must therefore include a discussion of the body, for as Burke asserts, "the

beginnings of the visual culture of modern consumption in the West were certainly replete with bodily images” (Burke, 11-12).

Even today, advertisers frequently tie their products to the “satisfaction of the body and its hungers” by showing them as tools to use in the constant work on the individual’s body project. Placed in a broader historical context, as opposed to the nineteenth century where clothing, wigs, make-up, etc. were bound to a specific social status and position, the ability to manipulate the presentation of the self in today’s society is thus perceived as a *true* expression of the self. In Schilling’s words, this has promoted the experience in people “of both *becoming* their bodies, in the sense of identifying themselves either negatively or positively with the ‘exterior’ of the body, and of being regularly *anxious* about the possibility that their body will let them down or ‘fall apart’ if they withdraw from its constant work and scrutiny.” (Schilling, 35-36) This scrutiny attached to the anxiety is important, because companies appeal to the fear of ageing, illness, and death to convince consumers they require the companies’ products.

## **Beautification**

Beauty is a central element in the consumption of fashionable commodities. The body is especially known for creating a point of massive consumption that is aimed at creating, sustaining, or enhancing beauty. What limits the study of the body as a self-identification project is the way in which images of the desirable body can become linked to pre-existing social inequalities, specifically between women and men. In this sense, women who take on the beautification project might do so more to conform to male fantasies and desires than to express themselves individually. Within Wihdat, the male’s voice was always the unspoken voice in the room. For the unmarried women, especially the younger girls, the conversation would traditionally end with a discussion of marriage suitability based on the decisions being made.

“I did not wear the burqa before we got married,” Asma told me one day when I asked her why she covered her face entirely under the burqa. I was expecting to receive a well thought

out response that had to do with religion, but her response was more unsettling and shocking. Prior to getting married, Asma wore the hijab comfortably and did not anticipate having to change. “When I met Ali, he told me that I needed to wear the burqa even though none of his sisters or any of the women in his family wear one. I don’t know where that came from.” She continued to tell me, “Sometimes even to family events I have to wear the niqab, which I don’t understand. I hate it, and I don’t know why anyone would like it because you can’t see out of it, but he [Ali] is my husband, so I wear it for him.” Her husband asked her to wear it based on his perception of beauty and his desire to preserve her beauty, and she acquiesced.

Asma’s story is not the only story of its kind. Maysun’s comments to Dana about marriage suitability reflect a perception that men will ultimately be the judges of beauty, deciding which women fit the ‘pretty’ category and which do not. Even Hanan’s experience and outburst at the beauty salon prior to her khutba illustrates this point. Hanan’s comments about the white cream and the makeup during our first visit together reflected a woman who was not afraid to be different and who had already decided against doing whitening powder and the excessive makeup. She mentioned that she did not like the white power and she thought the makeup was overly done. She added that she and her fiancé, Omar, had already spoken about how Hanan wanted the makeup done and they were completely in agreement. Nevertheless, by the time the party date arrived, Hanan was wearing the whitening makeup she had adamantly refused only a few weeks before. Her drastic change begs the question of what led to the change in behavior? When I asked her why she had opted to do the whitening cream, she said that she thought it would look nice for the pictures. Whitening creams, specifically, are an interesting topic to investigate, as they could be found in almost every store that sold creams and makeup. The bottle is not just selling a cream—it is selling the idea that “whiteness is positive, desirable, beautiful, and purchasable” (Ghannam, 546). The ability of the market to link the women’s faces on the bottles to the local preferences of whitening creams during wedding and engagement



ceremonies helps stimulate the desire to become whiter and it shapes the identities and bodies of the Wihdat consumers.



*Figure 13 Photo of a store selling beauty products*

Most of the women I saw and with whom I spent time did not wear much makeup. Although there were many stores in Wihdat that sold makeup, most women did not wear very much. When they did, it was a little lipstick or something natural. The only exception to this was Hanan's khutba, in which she and her fiancé's sisters had their faces painted professionally for the party. The makeup available inside Wihdat was off-brand and lower quality, which prevented it from lasting very long. Even beyond the corridor street, most of the women inside of Wihdat did not wear much makeup. I asked a man who worked at a beauty store why the women did not wear very much makeup, and he responded, "It brings them too much attention."



*Figure 14 Photo of Q&Q, a local accessories and makeup store near the main street in Wihdat*

Similar to beauty creams and makeup, hygiene is perhaps one of the most underrated consumable because it is often encapsulated under more complex elements of self-grooming:

These developments had two particularly important consequences in relation to the overall subject of this book. First, images of cleanliness, appearance, and beauty were increasingly used in nineteenth-century Western Europe to define social hierarchy and difference. Second, personal and social hygiene was increasingly portrayed as a key attribute of feminine domesticity. Both of these visions were given social power through a range of new institutions and official practices throughout Western Europe and in the United States around the turn of the century. (Burke, 18)

However, for communities that exist in such an environment as the refugee camp, the basic elements of hygiene emerge more clearly and may be applied in their raw form to symbolize or represent both the fundamental and luxurious elements of hygiene. The exploration of hygiene in Wihdat has to include an understanding of wealth and social inequality, both at a macro level of the camp as a whole and at a micro level on a house by house basis.

At a macro level, there were water shortages that occur within Wihdat. During the time that I was visiting Wihdat, the water would be delivered on Wednesdays and families would need to determine how to make the water last the entire week. Just as with money, the families would have to determine how much water could be spent on each thing in order to ensure they did not run out of water before the next distribution. Walking in the streets of Wihdat, one would see the streets lined with water that had overflowed from the tanks that had been filled, and even the scent would be different, fresher, the majority of its residents having showered on Wednesday in celebration of the weekly water distribution. However, unlike other parts of Amman, such as the upper class neighborhoods, where if one ran out of water a truck would come to refill the tank on demand, there was no such luxury, partially because of the street size, and partially because the water was rationed out by the camp administration, not on an individual basis. Nevertheless, homes that had larger storage capacity tanks for the water found that it was easier and more

comfortable to use water during the week than those that had weaker storage capacity tanks relative to the size of the family, affecting the amount of times people showered per week.

In Hanan's case, for example, she felt the need to shower most days as a way of eliminating the odors that had been impregnated on her clothes and body. Whereas normally hygiene is seen as a priority and an obligation to the self, in Hanan's house it was important as long as it did not conflict with something even more important—soccer. There was an expectation in the house that if there was a football match, then she needed to cook and be showered before her brother got home from work, otherwise she would not be able to shower since he would have friends coming over to the house. Subsequently, Hanan did not get a chance to shower sometimes, since her ability to shower was directly linked to how quickly she cooked and some meals took a long time to prepare. In the other homes, it was slightly different because they had a physical space for bathing, whereas Hanan did not. Hanan had her private space, but it was only respected insofar as it did not impede on anyone else's space. Bathing, given the nature of the kitchen serving as the shower, meant that it was not something private but instead something communal among the family.

Maysun's family had a routine for showering in order to take advantage and make the best use of the system. It was important, since there were seven people, 5 children, her husband and her, that needed to shower. While the youngest (Tina) would be bathed daily, the two younger boys (Ahmed and Mohammad) would shower together either every day or every other day, and Leila, Dana, and Maysun would shower as needed. Unlike Hanan who showered in the kitchen, Maysun's family showered in the bathroom using, as previously noted, the same water handle that was used with the toilet. They would shower by standing over the toilet and spraying/washing themselves. On days they could not shower, they would wet their hair with water from the sink and then wash their face with soap. Asma, similarly, bathed her young children every day, leaving her husband and her to shower as needed, or as the water quantity permitted.

In some cases, the women's hygiene practices had a direct effect not only on the appearance and beauty, but on health as well. Maysun, for example, frequently complained of severe pain in her mouth. Neither her nor her children brushed their teeth regularly as was evidenced by the shortage of toothbrushes in the house. Although there were a few toothbrushes by the sink, they remained dry and unused most of the time. Maysun, as a result of her pain, frequently went to the doctor and would return with one tooth less. She had four teeth removed over the course of six months and her children already had multiple silver crowns.

### **Body Modification Regimes**

As the six of us doing exercise tried to walk around the neighborhood, it was obvious that we were doing something different. We caught everyone's attention as we walked past other residents swiftly. Men would turn and watch us, their gazes following us as we continued. Eventually, the attention made the girls feel uncomfortable and led to our eventual return. As Maysun later explained, "women here do not just walk around the neighborhood because people will think they are not good."

The contemporary consumer culture makes distinctions between the 'youth' body and the 'aged' body. The "young, slim and sexual body is highly prized in contemporary consumer culture, whereas ageing bodies tend to be sequestered from public attention (we rarely, for example, see them engaged in sexual activities in movies)" (Schilling, 35). As such, the body has become increasingly important and central to the notion of the self as a performance as other thinkers contend, and this idea of the self as a performance transforms the body into a machine that needs to be "finely tuned, cared for, reconstructed, and carefully presented through such measures as regular exercise, personal health programmes, high-fibre diets and colour-coded dressing" (Schilling, 35). Refinement in the consumption of food reflects the extension of consumption towards the consumption of signs:

“Eating, as a model and metaphor of consumption, is generally associated with the *passive* consumer. Consumption in the form of eating signifies receiving, the incorporation and assimilation of some ready object to make it part of the physical or mental self.” (Falk, 38)

The roles of women in refinement of consumption habits for the commodities in question indicate that their consumption extends the already-created signs and often transforms it into some other (enforce) consumption. For instance, in order to become a wife, a woman has to have a man. In order to have a man, a woman has to view her body as something sacred to be protected and maintained. The stress that is placed on the appearance of women means that women become increasingly vulnerable to the fashion and diet industries that are consistently redefining what an ‘ideal’ woman should look like. What has been constant over the years, however, is that women should be thin (though *how* thin is changing).

The desire to be thin and attractive for a future husband was in daily conflict with the meals that the families ate. All of the families ate traditional Palestinian and Jordanian food most of the time, with the occasional exception with fried chicken strips and French fries. From dishes like maqlouba and mansaf to fried potatoes and okra, most of the dishes that they ate contained a fried component in the food, which is typically considered in western cultures to be unhealthy and something to avoid.



*Figure 15 Deep frying the qatayef deserts*

Having tasted all of the meals and enjoyed them, I asked Hanan if I could watch her cook one day so that I could learn the recipe for the maqlouba. I watched her as she prepared the chicken and as she soaked the rice. I saw her cut up the carrots, the potatoes, and the cauliflower. I then watched as she deep fried all of the vegetables, including the eggplant, in corn oil, and then arrange all of the ingredients in the pot and finish cooking it. “You have to fry the vegetables or the taste will be bad,” she told me after I asked about the amount of oil she was using to cook. Even those like Maysun who were deeply concerned about weight would sideline the concern when cooking, frequently using a large amount of oil to cook the meals they knew and loved. More specifically, they cooked using corn oil, citing the flavor as the reason. It was evident, however, that it was the cheapest oil available, which also meant that it had the most polyunsaturated fats.

The meals would be served on large serving platters and everyone would sit around the meal, sharing the same large platter for everyone. Participants in the meal would inevitably eat more than they should because they had continual access to the food that they wanted in the feast-style presentation. Nevertheless, the same women who were concerned with weight and physical attractiveness would partake in these eating activities, sitting to eat the high fat foods while simultaneously discussing the weight of the younger girls, who were slightly larger than what was *ideal*. “kuly, kuly kamān [eat, eat more]” they would tell me and put more food on my plate as I finished eating.



*Figure 16 Hanan's family prepares to sit down for supper*

Traditionally, fashion in the context of the body refers to beautification practices that include makeup and hygiene. In addition, body modification such as exercise and dietary regimes also beautify the body as a commodity, just in a more insidious nature. These processes of modification respond to the narrative of a fashionable body that, with a little effort, can align with the beauty ideals within the consumer culture. Consequently, the body, under the guise of fashion, becomes something consumable and regulated.

## **“Everything We Want, We Have Here”**

Over the the course of the time that I visited Wihdat, I came to know a scarf shop owner named Ahmed. He was from Syria and had moved to Wihdat in the aftermath of the Syrian conflict and had hired a 17-year-old boy named Ali to work with him. I would often go and sit in his shop conversing about politics and about life while watching women come into his store and purchase scarfs for hijabs. On one occasion, I took Hanan there because I knew that Ahmed would be very helpful and would give us a good deal on scarves. Hanan had mentioned to me in her living room that she needed a new scarf because she was tired of wearing dark colors, so we had gone in search of finding a scarf to help in her wardrobe color change. Although Hanan and Ahmed could both communicate better together than I could with either of them, I did most of the talking as Hanan acted very reserved when in the shop. Ahmed took out several scarves for us to look at and although Hanan found several she liked, she decided to buy a brown scarf and a burnt orange color scarf (colors she frequently wore).

Me: “I thought you want to try different colors.”

Hanan: “Yes, but the other ones are too loud.”

Me: “What do you mean, they are too loud? You said that you liked them.”

Hanan: “I do, but I do not want to draw too much attention, and if I get another color that doesn’t look like my skin, I will have a lot of attention.”

Me: “I think they look beautiful.”

Hanan: “I am too old to wear bright colors. Bright colors are for younger people.”

Although she had gone with the intention of buying new colors, Hanan concluded her purchase with the same colors she was trying to avoid. Her seemingly changed response from her house to the store was not uncommon and is indicative of a larger pattern that emerged throughout my visits in Wihdat. Although I spent most of my time with the women when the



men were not there, the influence of the men's perceptions and ideas always lingered overhead. Women would frequently tell a tale of a desired course of action, whether it was clothing or beauty, or scarves as in this case, but their preferences would be overpowered by what they perceived the male preferences to be in addition to societal preferences.

The stratifications that characterize the structure of fashion consumption in society are derived from highly dynamic elements – including highly subjective ideas of taste and preference. When discussing consumption, we can therefore not just think about class as something static, but instead, it is dynamic, involving haves and have-nots, wealth and poverty, needs and wants. Within each dynamic space, there are different communications occurring. As such, it is impossible to dictate *what* message the consumer transmits by her decisions regarding clothing, but it is instead important to hear from the actual consumer the decision-making logic that goes into such purchases. The person that is observed can therefore not be pre-classified as this would obscure or contradict the very nature of the elements being observed. It is important to use available markers to identify levels of sophistication but again; knowledge of these markers has to be interpreted in their appropriate context. Financial status is one such marker and it may emerge to influence a person's approach to consumption.

The ethnography of consumption, then, needs to account for more than the instant in which the consumer interacts between the particular commodity. Chen notes that “any particular act of consumption is a moment—a snapshot—taken at the confluence of complex social, political, and historical streams” (175). The ethnographical approach allows for a unique perspective into the lives of the consumers, offering them the opportunity to shape the context surrounding what they do and how they act. Especially in literature about Palestinian refugees, there is a habit of speaking for them about their needs, their wants, their values, and more. Ethnographical accounts, instead, help create a space in which their voices can be heard and understood, their stories speaking for themselves.

The case of Wihdat is unique, as I have stated from the beginning of the paper. Its status as a refugee camp that flows directly into the city as opposed to others that are enclosed spaces means that there are cultural aspects that are derived and integrated from the Jordanian society at-large. Despite its designation as a refugee camp, there are people spanning multiple generations that live there and embrace the seeming permanent nature of their status as residents of Wihdat, viewing it as a community of refugees instead of as a refugee camp. This affects the study of homes, for example, as residents in Wihdat really do consider their dwellings to be their homes. But, on a larger scale, it affects the way that people, in this case women, relate to the space they occupy. The structure of the refugee camp may be limited by the politics, economics, and social distinctions inside of the community, but this does not deny the options and choices that people are free to make based on their own needs assessments and valuations. Hanan said it best in a conversation about life in Wihdat when she said, “Everything that we want, we have here.”

This thesis has centered its attention on the manner in which diversity and distinction manifest themselves in Wihdat, a refugee camp in the heart of the capital city of Jordan. I have shown the manner in which women select their clothing and the differences that exist between the clothing used in public and that which is used in private spaces such as in the alley or in the privacy of the home. The relationship of the women to the space is very important and underlies all of the consumer decisions that occurred on a daily basis.

The public sphere had its own code of conduct and dress, to which all women adhered. While it is impossible to locate an origin of the expectations of women in the public sphere, it was promulgated by both men and women alike. Piety was required, and attention-seeking was discouraged. Encounters with the public spaces were kept to a minimum, the women venturing outside their corridor to go to the market for food or to buy necessity items that could not wait for a man to procure them. It was rare that women would casually stroll through the streets to pass time.

In this project, I blend the semi-private corridor with the private homes because even the private spaces were often not truly private, at least not often. The only time the home would truly be a private space was late into the evening when everyone had gone to their respective homes for the evening. Until then, people would enter and exit homes often without more than a knock's notice and the women had to be prepared for any situation. For Hanan, the only true private space and time she had was in her living room when her father was sleeping and the girls across the corridor were not awake. She would sit and enjoy a cup of hot coffee and watch the shows on television that she was unable to watch when her brothers were at home monopolizing the television with soccer. The peaceful serenity would last about an hour, if that, before people would begin visiting her and sitting with her. The rest of her day would be filled with people, and she would act as hostess until it was time to sleep and do it again the following day.

Through this paper, I have offered a glimpse into the home life of the women living in the camp. The Layout of the home, the decorations, and the use value of the spaces, play an important role in understanding consumption patterns. Finally, I have provided intimate details of women's lives and concerns as they relate to their bodies and what they talk about when discussing identity. Reviewing patterns of consumption, from those that are most public (clothing), to those that are most private and intimate (homes and bodies), I have endeavored to show, in my analysis, that the women in Wihdat are not a homogeneous group, but instead individual identities whose actions ascribe to and sometimes differ from the "popular" habits of behavior and whose consumer habits are formed based on their unique living circumstances, not based on solely poverty, or political status, or gender but also on their needs and wants as an individual and as a housewife and caretaker. Every woman with whom I spent time was different, socially, economically, in personality, and more. Each woman interacted with the various spaces in unique ways, even in spite of the commonalities.

Identity or its fabrication is one fundamental element that sustains consumers in the structure of consumption. Essentially, stages of development in life have come to be defined

based on how a person consumes. Consumers also feel the pressure to adopt norms of consumption that are associated with their gender, age, and other elements of identity. The child develops in a commoditized world (Schor, 2003) and may only get to know this as the real world. The child develops to attain some further sophistication or perceived sophistication in its ways of consumption in order to fit within the consumer society. Schor (2003) examines the issue child clothing and observes that the child is commoditized through clothing and even the 11-year old is seen to express love for fashion. The child is also motivated based on how it responds to consumption and as a result, the need to define ways of being that are meant to generate the maximum opportunities for further consumption is embedded in its individual aspirations. Children also begin to formulate social connections that are based on their consumption habits and aspirations. Children are quick to compare their consumption to those of their peers and will parents or guardians respond actively to needs that arise from such subjective comparative need assessments. As such, the formulation of frameworks of need analyses are founded on the individual's experience with commodities and the world that is primarily defined by these commodities and not on the assessment of an alternative world. It is very rare to find parents who actively avoid exposing their children to even the most gruesome elements of consumption – including addictive consumption as is the case for consuming social relations and sugary foods. The high level of complacency however is not entirely founded in sheer negligence as the parents can only apply the knowledge that is available to them and whether they even realize the nature of the consumption structure or not can be a more complex issue that touches on their own identity. The free adult frames her freedom based on opportunities created for consumption and may lack any other greater view of life. Life therefore appears to be hooked to the cycle of consumption and aligning one's self-perception to the consumable ways and consumable objects is an essential aspect of formulating an identity for the consumer. The consumer is also faced with the task of responding to a bigger world that appears to revolve around consumables in order to maintain her identity. As such, the only real effort that is felt to be genuine in self-

betterment is that which is meant to foster the congruency of one's identity with the permissible ways of being that are defined in the structure of consumption.

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